

THE KABBALAH IN BYZANTIUM: PRELIMINARY REMARKS*

Moshe Idel

I. INTRODUCTION: BEGINNINGS, CENTERS, AND SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

A wide variety of religious positions, and occasionally even opposing viewpoints, are reflected within the extensive kabbalistic literature now in our possession. Consequently, we can infer that the “Kabbalah” had diverse starting points. Scholars have tended to award special importance to its phenomenological beginning and consequently they avidly sought evidence which would confirm the first appearance of the symbolic system, convinced as they were that this system expressed for the Kabbalists the hidden meaning of the Jewish tradition. I refer to their efforts to disclose the earliest kabbalistic documents, those that could clearly attest to the existence of the theosophical system. Study of these documents confirmed for them that the Kabbalah first appeared in the second half of the twelfth century in Provence, the locale that, according to these scholars, the first historical personalities known to be Kabbalists, as well as the first book considered to be kabbalistic, *Sefer ha-Bahir*, were detected.¹ According to the accepted academic description, some of these kabbalistic ideas spread to the cities of Gerona and Barcelona, both in Catalonia, and from there continued to disseminate reaching Castile where, in the second half of the thirteenth century, they underwent dramatic development. Before us lies the scholarly assumption which proposed that the Kabbalah developed in a linear trajectory. The question of the dissemination of kabbalistic literature beyond the borders of the Iberian Peninsula did

* This is an English translation by Dr. Iris Felix of a Hebrew article printed initially in the journal *Kabbalah* 18 (2008): 197–227 where the reader can find also the Hebrew original texts. The original Hebrew version has been slightly revised and updated.

¹ G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, translated by A. Arkush, edited by R. Werblowsky (Philadelphia, 1987).

not especially preoccupy these scholars. The paths of transmission of kabbalistic traditions from one center to another were, for them, only secondary concerns subsumed within the larger historical picture of the development of the Kabbalah.

Nevertheless, from the middle of the thirteenth century there is solid testimony of the existence of kabbalistic traditions, sometimes of meaningful proportions, to be found in five additional geographical centers: North Africa,² Franco-Germany,³ Italy,⁴ Sicily,⁵ the Byzantine Empire, and the Land of Israel.⁶ We are not speaking merely about the transmission of ideas but about beginnings that enjoyed continuity, about the establishment of centers of study which proved to be historically significant since they continued to produce kabbalistic works well after the disappearance of the Spanish center. In other words, already by the second half of the thirteenth century a linear description of the transmission of the Kabbalah proves irrelevant for fostering a deep understanding of the development of the Kabbalah. In my opinion, even prior to this historical period this type of description poses an essential difficulty. The important variations that existed between kabbalistic traditions found in Provence and those found in Catalonia to my mind give proof of the existence of different antecedent sources.⁷ Assuming the existence of different esoteric trends

² M. Idel, "The Beginning of Kabbala in North Africa? A Forgotten Document by R. Yehudah ben Nissim ibn Malka," *Pe'amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry* 43 (Spring 1990): 4–15 (Hebrew).

³ See G. Scholem, *The Beginning of the Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1948), 195–238 (Hebrew).

⁴ See M. Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati—The Kabbalist* (Jerusalem, 1998), 33–50 (Hebrew). More on the Italian center of Kabbalah, its emergence and its interaction with the Byzantine one see my *La cabbala in Italia (1280–1510)*, trans. F. Lelli, (Giuntina, 2007), the English version appeared in 2011 at Yale University Press, New Haven.

⁵ The details of Abulafia's activities in the cities Messina and Palermo warrant a separate study. About a legend concerning a Kabbalist from North Africa who arrived in Sicily see Idel, "The Beginning of Kabbala in North Africa?" 4–5.

⁶ M. Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany, 1988), 91–101.

⁷ See M. Idel, "Intention in Prayer in the Early Kabbalah: Between Franco-Germany and Provence," *Porat Yosef: Studies in Honor of R. Dr. Yosef Safran*, ed. B. Safran (Hoboken, 1992), 5–14 (Hebrew); "Prayer in Provencial Kabbalah," *Tarbiz* 62 (1993): 265–86 (Hebrew); "Interpretations of the Secret of Incest in the Early Kabbalah," *Kabbalah* 12 (2004): 89–199 (Hebrew); "On the Concept of Zimzum in Kabbalah and its Research," *Lurianic Kabbalah, Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 10 (1992): 59–112 (Hebrew); H. Pedaya, *Nahmanides: Cyclical Time and Holy Text*, (Tel-Aviv, 2003) (Hebrew); M. Idel, "The Time of the End": Apocalypticism and Its Spiritualization in Abraham Abulafia's Eschatology," *Apocalyptic Time*, ed.,

during the nascent period of the Kabbalah invites the possibility that these traditions could have undergone divergent as well as synthetic developments. In this context we could ask: did the arrival of these traditions to different locations generate further divergences? This line of questioning might perhaps take into account the different kinds of receptions these traditions enjoyed when they reached the specific cultural-historical circumstances that characterize the different centers. For instance, the Franco-German center, which already possessed its own esoteric and magical traditions, independent of the kabbalistic ones, accepted the Kabbalah differently than the North African center, which also possessed magical traditions, although of a different nature, theirs being dependent upon Hermetic traditions.⁸ The historical-phenomenological picture becomes even more complicated when we take note of the distinct possibility that some of the developments that occurred in these centers—whether they were due to local traditions extant before the arrival of the Kabbalah or newly formed synthetic traditions—influenced the developmental process of the Kabbalah in Spain starting from the sixth decade of the thirteenth century. The developments in these other centers would have enriched the stock of esoteric traditions already found in the Iberian Peninsula, sometimes even in the guise of a negative reaction to developments within the Kabbalah from outside as well as from inside Spain.⁹

I would venture to say that in order to understand the multiplicity and range of schools of kabbalistic thought, each possessing its own starting point, its own phenomenology and special history, it would be more effective to adopt another attitude, one that does not seek to find only unifying factors or emphasize a common theological basis for all the diverse kabbalistic literature. This proposal is borne out by the fact that many of the Kabbalists themselves were acquainted with a wide range of views on any given topic, and occasionally even chose more

A. Baumgarten (Leiden, 2000), 155–86; idem, *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven, 1998), 58–100; E. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia—Kabbalist and Prophet: Hermeneutics, Theosophy, and Theurgy* (Los Angeles, 2000).

⁸ M. Idel, “Hermeticism and Kabbalah,” *La tradizione ermetica dal mondo tardo antico all’umanesimo, Atti del Convegno nazionale di studi, Napoli, 20–24 novembre 2001*, a cura di Paolo Lucentini, Ilaria Parri, Vittoria Perrone Compagni (Turnhout, 2003), 385–427.

⁹ On the arrival of motifs stemming from Ashkenazi esoteric doctrines to Spain during the second half of the thirteenth century see M. Idel, “Ashkenazi Esotericism and Kabbalah in Barcelona,” *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 5 (2007): 69–113.

than one understanding or one solution in order to resolve the question at hand. In order to implement this type of research method, one must carefully analyze many details such as: concepts, models, wider imaginative structures, movement of people and materials from locale to locale, and assess the particular religious natures of the centers that were involved in the transmissions of these esoteric traditions.

Indubitably, the presence of a well-defined type of kabbalistic writing during the period that the Kabbalah first made its appearance within a specific geographic area would have left an indelible mark on its later development in this area. This pertains not only to the continuous intergenerational study of a certain body of literature, an understandable and natural phenomenon, but also to a certain type of understanding, maybe a peculiar hermeneutic, that would later be applied to other kabbalistic materials that reached this locale later. In the following pages, we will for the first time survey a general picture of the development of the Kabbalah in Byzantium, on the basis of bibliographical findings of previous scholars—especially E. Gottlieb and M. Kushnir-Oron—as well as my own research. I would like to point out that I will only deal with literature considered to be kabbalistic, namely, medieval material, and I will not concern myself here with Jewish mystical literature (i.e. *The Heikhalot* or liturgical poetry) even if elements of these literatures did find their way into kabbalistic works.¹⁰ On the other hand, I will not limit my discussion to the period of the rule of the Byzantine Empire, in other words until the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in the middle of the fifteenth century. I have widened my survey by almost one hundred years, since the trends that marked Byzantine kabbalistic literature endured that much longer after the fall of the Empire. A few of the ensuing discussions will concern issues of determining the time and place of kabbalistic compositions during the period of the Byzantine Empire. These discussions are necessary for the presentation of Byzantine literature as a separate unit, to be set apart to a certain degree from the other centers. The very act of bringing together the compositions that we are going to consider as Byzantine will contribute to a new perspective on the history of the Kabbalah, emphasizing the many important geographical

¹⁰ On this subject see D. Abrams, "Esoteric Writing in Ashkenaz and its Transition to Spain," *Mahanaim: A Quarterly for Studies in Jewish Thought and Culture* 6 (Jerusalem, 1993): 94–103 (Hebrew); M. Idel, "From Italy to Ashkenaz and Back, On the Circulation of Jewish Mystical Traditions," *Kabbalah* 14 (2006): 47–94.

centers, their special characters, as well as the power struggles between them. Some of the discussions are based on my perusal of numerous manuscripts, a significant portion of which have yet to be awarded detailed study. The limited framework of this article, understandably, does not allow for a more thorough and insightful survey of this literature, whose study still remains before us as a desideratum.

II. R. ABRAHAM ABULAFIA'S TWO VISITS TO GREECE

As far as we can assess, the first Kabbalist to compose a kabbalistic work on Byzantine soil and even actively promulgate his Kabbalah there was R. Abraham ben Shmuel Abulafia.¹¹ He visited Greece twice—once during the first few years of the 1260s, when he got married and before he was actually involved in the writing of Kabbalah: “I could not reach the Sambatyon River, for due to the wars of Ishmael and Esau I could not pass beyond Acre. So I left and returned by way of the kingdom of Greece, where I married a woman on my travels. There the spirit of G-d aroused me and I took my wife with me and started [to travel] in the direction of the springs of Ravenna to study Torah.”¹² The events mentioned here took place in the early 1260s and we assume that it was familial ties that caused Abulafia's later return to Greece.

The second time Abulafia visited Greece was during the second half of the 70s of the thirteenth century, after he had already studied Kabbalah and was subject to mystical experiences. He appears to have been in several places in the vicinity of southern Europe, including the Grecian cities of Thebes, Euthrypo, and Patros. It is very likely that one of his several books on the secrets found in Maimonides's *Guide*

¹¹ On this Kabbalists' unique brand of Kabbalah see, M. Idel, *R. Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrine* (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1976) (Hebrew); idem., *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. M. Kallus, (Albany, 1989); *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. J. Chipman (Albany, 1987); “Between Magic of the Holy Names and the Kabbalah of the Names, Abraham Abulafia's Criticism,” *Mahanaim* 14 (2003): 79–95 (Hebrew); “Abulafia's Secrets of the Guide: A Linguistic Turn,” in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism, Dedicated to the Memory and Academic Legacy of its Founder Alexander Altmann*, eds., A. Ivry, E. Wolfson and A. Arkush (Amsterdam, 1998), 289–329; E. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia: Hermeneutics, Theosophy, and Theurgy* (Los Angeles, 2000); see also below notes 22, 58, 60, 142, 159.

¹² *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, Ms. Oxford-Bodlian 1580, fol. 164a, and compare to the version printed in the edition published by A. Gross (Jerusalem, 2005), 368.

of the *Perplexed* was composed then in Greece—the one entitled *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*.¹³ If this assumption proves to be accurate than this book would be considered to be the first kabbalistic book to ever be composed in Greece. I will return later to the subject of this book's ensuing influence in the Byzantine Empire.

All of our knowledge concerning Abulafia's sojourn and activities in Greece stem from his own writings. Since this is the case we will examine the relevant data gleaned from his works. I will commence with his description of his own composition, which is of a unique nature, and which introduced a new genre of kabbalistic literature, which Abulafia called the Books of Prophecy. So he writes in his own commentary on his fourth prophetic book, written in Italy:

This book¹⁴ is the third commentary on the fourth Book [of Prophecy],¹⁵ for Raziel¹⁶ composed [his] first [prophetic book] *Sefer ha-Yashar*, while in the city of Patros, in the country of Greece, in the year 5039 of Creation. He was then 39 years old, and this was the ninth year since he received his first prophecy.¹⁷ But until this year he never composed a book that could be considered as prophetic at all, although he had composed many philosophical works, among them a few on the secrets of Kabbalah. And in this ninth year God stirred him to go to the great city of Rome, as He had commanded him in Barcelona in the year 'E"l [= God; but it points to the year 5030/1=1270/1271 C.E.]. On his journey he passed through Trani and was seized by the gentiles after being denounced by Jewish slanderers, but miraculously with God's help, he was saved. Then he continued on to Capua and composed there,¹⁸ in the tenth year of his departure from Barcelona,¹⁹ the second [prophetic] book, *Sefer ha-Hayyim*. It was in the tenth year in the month of Av, the fifth month counting from Nissan and the eleventh month counting

¹³ Concerning this composition see M. Idel, *R. Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrine*, 11.

¹⁴ The book referred to here is *Sefer ha-'Edut*, one of Abulafia's prophetic works.

¹⁵ Abulafia wrote commentaries on his own (now lost in their original form) prophetic works, but in reverse order of their composition.

¹⁶ Raziel = Abraham = 248. This is the most important of the theophoric names that Abulafia adopted for himself, and is ubiquitous especially in his prophetic works.

¹⁷ This statement provides us with one of Abulafia's own testimonies relating to his first experience of revelation in the year 1270, which according to the Jewish calendar occurred 30 years into the sixth millennium (5030).

¹⁸ The reference is to Capua.

¹⁹ This means that he left Barcelona—but not Spain—in the year 1271. See below, note 44.

from Tishrei, that he arrived in Rome intending to go on the eve of Rosh ha-Shanah before the Pope.^{20, 21}

According to Abulafia, he started to compose his prophetic books in Patros [Patras], Greece, where he had a revelation similar in content to the one he had experienced nine years earlier while he was still in Barcelona, when he had started to study Kabbalah. Nevertheless, despite this earlier revelation, which it would seem constituted a formative experience for both his prophetic and messianic consciousness and his ensuing literary activities, which did include kabbalistic works, he did not produce at the time any prophetic works. It would seem that in the years following his relatively short stay in Barcelona, he experienced additional revelations. The initial composition of his prophetic works bear testimony to a renewal and intensification of these revelations, with an additional meaning, for these revelations also bore a mission for the Kabbalist and now its time was getting closer: he was to seek an audience with the Pope on the Jewish New Year in the year 1280. His leaving Patros, located in the western Peloponnese, and his arrival in the city of Trani in eastern Italy, was part of a more extensive travel plan whose final destination was Rome. We can surmise from here that the city of Patros was the last stop of his second visit to Greece and that prior to this—as we will soon see—there had been visits to two other cities there. As I postulated above, it seems likely that his book *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh* was composed there, and if so then probably in one of these other two cities. It is important to note that Abulafia distinguished between his earlier works on kabbalistic and philosophical subjects and the prophetic works, which he held in greater esteem, viewing them as of a higher caliber. We can assume that he did not distinguish too sharply between the kabbalistic works and the prophetic ones, for there was a third and even higher type of Kabbalah—the revelation of a *Bat Qol*, and even the hybrid expression “Prophetic Kabbalah” testifies to this higher type of Kabbalah as well.²²

²⁰ Concerning Abulafia’s failed attempt to receive an audience with the Pope see my *Chapters in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1990), 51–74 (Hebrew).

²¹ *Sefer ha-’Edut*, Ms. Munich 43, fol. 203b, previously printed according to three manuscript variants in *Studies* (ibid.) pp. 58–59. Compare to *Sefer Matzref ha-Sekhel*, A. Gross edition (Jerusalem, 2001), 57.

²² M. Idel, “On the Meanings of the term “Kabbalah”: Between the Ecstatic and the Sefirotic Schools of Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century,” *Pe’amim* 93 (2003): 39–76 (Hebrew).

Consequently, it is plausible to assume that in comparison to his kabbalistic works composed while still in Spain and maybe one or more in Greece, *Sefer ha-Yashar* was considered by him to be a step up to a new level of creativity in his own literary development. At least in this case we can discern a direct relationship between a revelatory experience and a literary composition that adequately reflects its content.

We will now discuss Abulafia's commentary to his non-extant *Sefer ha-Yashar*, written a few years later, which preserves in it a few phrases of the original book:

Said Raziel: in the thirty-ninth year of the return²³ of the word of 'Adonay YHWH to the mouths of His prophets, the Angel of 'Elohim came to me, I Berakhياهو ben Shalviel,²⁴ and announced a word to me:²⁵ I have already informed you that this is the first book that Raziel composed in the form of prophecy, namely that he mentioned in it [the formula] "Thus has H [namely God] said," which is the form of the word of divine prophecy, which requires a mighty inquiry as to its matter and way. Know that this book is the first of his prophetic works and that this is the sixth and the last of my commentaries on it. The matter of the *Haftarah* is to be considered an addition, similar to an appendix that ends all of the six commentaries, not only the last one, but each and every one of them. Therefore, with God's help in the appendix, I would like to discuss the secret of prophecy. In this [current] book I will not discuss it,²⁶ although it may appear sporadically in a few places, without any proper investigation or order, because this commentary is like no other commentary, not in image nor in form.²⁷ For their Rock is not as our Rock.²⁸ And our Source is not foreign to their Source. But our words are as [deep as] flesh and blood. Whereas their words are as superficial veins and skin. Would their light be kept from evil-doers! Those who seek to harm us in their rooms [in private]. Who scheme how to contradict our words. Has not their Rock sold them? And their Lord shut them up!²⁹

²³ Abulafia means to say that prophecy has returned to Israel. Concerning his use of the plural term "prophets" see my comments in *Messianic Mystics*, 297.

²⁴ Berakhياهو = Abraham = 248, and also Shalviel = Shmuel = 377 as in Abulafia's father's name. For Abulafia's further discussion of this particular name see below.

²⁵ I assume that until this point these words are quoted from the non-extant prophetic work, *Sefer ha-Yashar* and the following is the commentary.

²⁶ Apparently Abulafia did not intend to dwell on the secret of prophecy in this book, but would mention it sporadically.

²⁷ At this juncture the text assumes a rhymed-prose style, a popular medieval literary form known as the *maqama*.

²⁸ Deuteronomy 32: 31.

²⁹ This is a paraphrase of Deuteronomy 32: 30.

Therefore you must investigate the truth of the souls³⁰ of all the Names. Until you know the totality of the *Sefirot*. Of all the thoughts that are thought to unify. On this you shall build all of your thoughts. And to Him shalt thou hold fast and swear by His name.^{31, 32}

We are faced with the question, what is the meaning of the title *Sefer ha-Yashar*, which Abulafia gave to his first book of prophecy? I imagine that there is a connection between this title and Abulafia's self-perception also as an author of a hagiographic work in all senses of the term, including being read in the synagogue after the Torah reading as the Hagiographic Portion of the week or *Haftarah*, hence his last composition was entitled aptly *Sefer ha-Haftarah*.³³ It seems to me that the title, *Sefer ha-Yashar*, alludes to the fact that this first prophetic book is similar in nature to the Torah, and this in my opinion is made clear by a play on words found in *Sefer ha-Yashar: Har Patros = Séfer Torah*.³⁴ A special relationship exists between the concept of Torah and another extant book of prophecy called *ha-Berit ha-Hadashah*, "New Covenant"—reminiscent of the phrase New Testament—Abulafia's fourth book of prophecy. This teaches us that *Sefer ha-Yashar* is the first in a series of unique books to be distinguished from the author's previous kabbalistic works, and that this series exudes pretentiousness exceptional to the Jewish tradition and even the Kabbalah. This hubris seems to be connected to the theophoric names that this Prophetic Kabbalist characteristically called himself in these works, *Raziel* and *Berakhiyahu*. Indeed, it becomes quite clear that Abulafia surmised that he was granted revelations that were to serve as a prototype of a New Torah. The Revealing Angel told the Kabbalist: "For a new Torah I will innovate amongst the holy nation, it is the people of Israel, which is my sublime Name that is like a New Torah. This Name was not explained to my people since the day that I hid my face from them. Although it is a hidden Name it can [now] be explained.

³⁰ The souls = of all the names = the totality of the sefirot = of all the thoughts = that are thought to unify = 841. If we spell the first word of this series, "truth", *amitat*, without its *yod* (a common spelling), then it also possesses a numerical value or *gematria* of 841, and this seems to me to be Abulafia's intention.

³¹ Deuteronomy 10: 20.

³² *Sefer ha-Yashar*, printed in *Sefer Matzref ha-Sekhel*, 95. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 295–6.

³³ Concerning this composition see Idel, *R. Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrine*, 14.

³⁴ *Sefer ha-Yashar*, printed in *Sefer Matzref ha-Sekhel*, 98.

Then he commanded me to hide no more His Name from those who inquire it in truth."³⁵ Here the New Torah contains a specific content, the identification of a divine Name, although in another work, written many years later, this New Torah is explained in a way that is much closer to the "paths":

It is known that every letter and every word in the Torah [when written or] pronounced can bear many different meanings, all the more so if we use the paths of [letter] combinations, numerical equivalents [*gematria*], acrostics, permutations, substitutions, substitutions for the substitutions and the like. For then each path widens more and more, by the thousands and the tens of thousands [the possibilities of interpretation] on every single vowel. This path includes the written, spoken and thought [letters of Torah] and no philosopher has ever heard it nor known nor perceived [on his own] a big or small portion of it. And if he had heard of it he could not accept it unless he first cast away all his acquired knowledge, exited his fate and returned to the days of his youth and learned this new Torah.³⁶

It is clear that the New Torah includes the hermeneutical methods mentioned in the beginning of the passage. On the other hand, Abulafia describes his last prophetic work, *Sefer ha-Haftarah*, also as *Sefer ha-Besorah*,³⁷ the title meant to be a pun on the term *Evangelion*, the Christian Gospels, as seemingly an attempt to argue for the superiority of his revelation over the Christian one.

We will now turn to the meaning of the theophoric names, which will become clear from other issues discussed in *Sefer ha-Yashar*, wherein also lies a clue to the meaning of the book's title:

You should know that Raziel is called in this book Berakhiyahu ben Shalviel, in accordance with the first name,³⁸ and this is because it is known that he received the blessing from the Name, and peace and serenity, as in the beginning and end of the priestly blessing. Every blessing is [divine] influx, which is the opposite of a curse, and all peace is good, which is the opposite of evil. Behold! The word good is male and the word blessing was female gendered and then reverted back to male. Life is good and blessing together—and blessing is the tree of life—

³⁵ *Commentary on Sefer ha-Haftara*, Ms. Rome-Angelica 38, fol. 37a; also printed in *Sefer Matzref ha-Sekhel*, 113. See also M. Idel, "Torah Hadashah: Messiah and the New Torah in Jewish Mysticism and Modern Scholarship," *Kabbalah* 21 (2010): 68–76.

³⁶ *Sefer 'Imrei Shefer*, A. Gross edition, 197. Compare this text to the quote mentioned below from *Sefer 'Even Sappir*.

³⁷ Printed in *Sefer Matzref ha-Sekhel*, 108.

³⁸ In other words, this one is the first of Abulafia's theophoric names.

and good is life and living.³⁹ Life, blessing, and good cannot exist without God's blessing, His wisdom and His providence. If a man "blesses himself by the God of truth,"⁴⁰ then happy is he and happy is his lot, in this world and in the next. And you should know that Raziel called this book by the title *Sefer ha-Yashar*, whose secret is *Shem ShYRaH*,⁴¹ *YeShaRaH*, *Tefillah*,⁴² because of an incident that happened to him he called it *Tannin*, whose secret hinges on two opposites, in the name of the Attribute of Judgment, by the name of the wise soul.⁴³

It is difficult to ascertain exactly what transpired in Patros that would have prompted Abulafia to use the term "the name of the Tannin" namely Dragon, or the expression "The Attribute of Judgment." It would seem that while he was there he had both positive and negative experiences, hence the use of the term "two opposites." One of the central motifs of his revelation in Patros can be discerned from the following quote:

Then afterwards Raziel saw a vision in which he attained the secret of the Name and the secret of prophecy and the essence of its truth. And he said, at the time Five [H] was to bring him to Dibbon, this was in the sixth year [W] of his departure from Sefarad [Spain],⁴⁴ in the tenth [Y] [month] which is called Tevet, on the fifth [H] day wherein, behold

³⁹ The living = life = and good = 23.

⁴⁰ Isaiah 65: 16.

⁴¹ *Sefer ha-Yashar* = *shem shirah* [= *yesharah*] = *shem ha-Tannin* = *metzayyier she-nei hafakhim* = *be-shem middat ha-Din* = *be-shem ha-Nefesh ha-Hakhamah* = 855.

⁴² *Ha-Yashar* = *yesharah* = *shirah* = *tefillah* = 515.

⁴³ *Sefer ha-Yashar*, printed in *Sefer Matzref ha-Sekhel*, 96. See also Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 295.

⁴⁴ It is evident that we have to distinguish between Abulafia's departure from Barcelona, in circa 1271, and his departure from Spain a few years later, circa 1273 or 1274, after a tour in some towns in Castile, where he taught his Kabbalah to a series of Kabbalists. See also above in the text near footnote 19. Thus six years later, when this passage was written, means 1279, the year when he expressly testifies that he wrote *Sefer ha-Yashar*. Compare, however, the claim of H. Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder: Abraham Abulafia, the Franciscans and Joachimism* (Albany, 2007), 7, 31, 39, 40, 71, that situates this revelation in 1276, assuming that Abulafia left Spain in 1271, and built an entire intellectually fascinating construct, predicated on the importance of this alleged revelation which took place, according to him, in 1276, and upon an assumption that Abulafia, perhaps, was then in Sicily. According to this text, however, he was for five years elsewhere, most probably in Patros and beforehand in two other cities in the region, as mentioned in one of the following quotes, namely in Euthryo, and Thebes. Therefore, I do not find it possible to presuppose a stay in Sicily in the seventies, an issue that dramatically calls into question the construct about Abulafia's putative acquaintance with Joachimism or Franciscans before his arrival in Italy for the second time, in 1279.

the secret of the Name was revealed. Also *Patros, sefirot, shemot*,⁴⁵ and this [wordplay] continued and he mentioned the blessing. And then he began [to reveal the secret of] the Name, said Raziel: And YY 'Elohai [My God] sent His angel before me and showed me "the paths of His Name."⁴⁶ And I saw from it ten visions of 'Elohim, the tenth vision as the first vision and the voice of Shaddai going forth from between them, and I feared greatly when I heard the voice. And ten words did I understand from one voice and seven languages in each and every one.⁴⁷ ... Combine them and know them, the ten paths of the Name.⁴⁸ He explained to him their secrets and instruct thus that the being of the perfect man in actuality is of three worlds. Now three by three using multiplication is nine, and one remains, either the tenth or the first, and it is with the three and they are with him, all told they are nine visions, and one that is ten, and one that is all. And the speech is heard from all of them, and they all revolve to and fro and the median between them⁴⁹ is the unique word. This is hinted [in the verse] "Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thy hand upon me."⁵⁰ "*Va-tashet 'alai khapekhah*", *va-ta'ash Telyi hafekhakh*,⁵¹ ... This is the secret of *gemulo 'imanu* [his retribution is with us] and *'am 'amusei baten*, and know it! This number is understood [to be derived] from 28, 19, and it is hinted at [in the verse] "for he has shut their eyes, that they cannot see, and their hearts, that they cannot understand."^{52, 53}

Abulafia claims to have experienced a revelation at Patros, where he arrived around 1278. The resort to the ten paths of utilizing the divine Name for attaining prophecy seems to be related to the mentioning of Dibbon, found at the beginning of the above quote (which is apparently the name of a city) and the revelation of the divine Name. We are now faced with the question: what is the meaning of the terms "the divine Name" or "the paths of His name"? I would like to emphasize

⁴⁵ *Patros = sefirot = shemot = 746*.

⁴⁶ This expression also appears further on in this quotation, its meaning being the technical use of the letters of the Names of God in order to achieve prophecy. In other works Abulafia uses this term and similar terms like "the paths of Names" to signify technical use of the Name. See especially the quote discussed below from his *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*.

⁴⁷ In other words, he means he heard a total of seventy voices.

⁴⁸ *Darkhei shemo = ha-'asarah = 580*.

⁴⁹ This phrase is from *Sefer Yetzirah* 3:1.

⁵⁰ Psalms 139: 5.

⁵¹ These are combinations of letters of the preceding verse. *Telyi*, an entity found in *Sefer Yetzirah*, is understood here as the inverse of God.

⁵² Isaiah 44: 18.

⁵³ *Sefer ha-Yashar*, printed in *Sefer Matzref ha-Sekhel*, ed. A. Gross, 98. The details of the vision are quite complex and necessitate a special analysis which cannot be done in this framework.

that in the above quotation we find three recurring themes: the number ten, letter combinations, and the paths of the divine Name. Even though our prophetic Kabbalist's words here are enigmatic and seem inscrutable, I would like to clarify the details of his revelation in Patros by comparing them to another of his statements, written not more than a year later. In *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, composed in Rome in the year 1280, Abulafia writes:

And this is the path that you should give over to him.⁵⁴ Write for him ten Names that are combined one after the other, and thus you should interpret them for him—according to the interpretations that you see in this book. And you should make him give you his oath concerning his receiving [this tradition] that he should protect it, and these are the ten Names... behold, I have already written for you ten words of the Name of seventy-two letters, and they are explained by way of the Kabbalah. You should understand through this matter each word clearly, and know that among the holy wisdoms there is none other like this wisdom, for it is the holy of holies and the ultimate purpose of all the ways that man can possibly reach the knowledge of the Name, perception of His actions, recognition of His ways and His attributes. For His Names, the Exalted [One], they are the very closest things to Him, and they are the truths of His Torah.⁵⁵

The importance of “the path” namely, or this particular method for his Kabbalah is underscored in another place in the same composition:

The path that you should hold by and stick to all the days [of your life] is the path of rearranging letters and their [re-]combinations. Understand its meaning and you will keep eternal happiness, and this happiness will inspire you in your heart to [perform] more combinations, increasing your happiness and joy. Hurry to turn [*hafokh*]⁵⁶ [invert the letters] as

⁵⁴ To the student.

⁵⁵ A. Gross edition (Jerusalem, 1999), 118.

⁵⁶ The verb *hafokh* (literally meaning turn around, figuratively as rearranging letters to make new words) expresses the transformative power of the method of letter combinations in Abulafia's thought. Concerning the “spiritual revolution” that appears in another text of Abulafia's see below footnotes 76, 88. An additional text that can contribute to our understanding of the centrality of this verb for Abulafia can be found in his *Sefer 'Or ha-Sekhel*, A. Gross edition (Jerusalem, 2002), 50, where the practice of letter substitutions are described by use of the verb *hafokh*. In this text Abulafia deals with the understanding of man as an inverted tree and an inverted angel: “For the secret of the ineffable Name commands us thus: “invert His upright Name—make upright His inverted Name.” And the secret is because man is an inverted tree, I mean to say an inverted angel, created by means of the blade of the turning sword, and this secret you will find explicitly if you combine these three holy Names, which are the three heads of existence.” In my opinion, the secret of inversion [*ha-hippukh*] or the

the blade of the revolving sword turns in all directions to wage war on the enemies that surround it. For the imaginings and the images⁵⁷ of idle thoughts which are born from the spirit of the evil inclination, they go forth to meet the reckoning [method, *Heshbon*]⁵⁸ at first they surround it like murderers, attempting to confuse the minds of earthly men, this is because of the sin of Adam and Eve.⁵⁹

The three themes that we listed above from *Sefer ha-Yashar*, which relate to the content of Abulafia's revelation in Patros, also appear in the first quote from *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*. Although the later book does not mention a revelation from above as the source of these specific contents, it does claim for its source an oral tradition handed down from a master to his student. Nevertheless, it seems to me that these two excerpts share another subject, one that is not immediately apparent. They both speak of the Divine Name, but only the second text explicitly states the identity of this Name: we refer to the divine Name of seventy-two letters, which forms the core of Abulafia's most interesting book, and one of his most influential works as well. In contrast, the divine Name of seventy-two letters does not play any significant role in his *Sefer ha-Yashar*. In spite of this fact, it appears that we can find an allusion to this Name in the quote above from *Sefer ha-Yashar*. I refer to the word "Dibbon," which even though it denotes a city, probably another reference to the city of Patros, [actually] the sum of its letters in *gematria* equals seventy-two.⁶⁰ If my assumption

method of deconstructing the letters is to be understood, since it appears in many places in the context of *sefirot*, as pointing to the direction of the complex influx as it is received by the Kabbalist. Compare to Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, 172. On the source of the image of the revolving sword in Maimonides's works, see *ibid.*, 173 note 123.

⁵⁷ The word used here is *tziyyur* (conceptualization) no doubt a play on words meant to show its similarity to the word used further on in the same sentence *yetzer* (instinct or inclination).

⁵⁸ This term conveys in a large part the kabbalistic techniques used by Abulafia. See M. Idel, "The Battle of the Urges: Psychomachia in the Prophetic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia," in *Peace and War in Jewish Culture*, ed., A. bar-Levav (Jerusalem, 2006), 99–143, (Hebrew).

⁵⁹ *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1582, fol. 31a.

⁶⁰ Note Abulafia's use of the seventy-two letter Name, which is worked out to be equivalent to 216, when he explains in this manner the name of the island of Sicily as "the island of Seeing" (*'iy ha-Re'i*) or "the island of Power" (*'iy ha-Gevurah*) [The three verses of seventy-two letters each from which derives the seventy-two letter name (Exodus 14, 19–21) = *ha-re'yi* = *gevurah* = 216]. Compare this to the alternative explanation offered by Harvey Hames, who finds in the name *'iy ha-Re'i* an acrostic reference to the land of Israel. Based on this acrostic solution Hames constructs an interpretation of Abulafia's hermeneutics as having been influenced by the thought of Joachim of Fiore. As we have shown above, Abulafia's conception of a "New Torah"

concerning the esoteric content of the revelation in Patros is correct, that it would be disclosed later in Rome within the comprehensive and detailed structure of his book *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, then it was in the Peloponnese that the seed was sown for the central work of this prophetic Kabbalist. It is interesting that it was in Patros that Abulafia experienced a recurrence of a previous revelation, which took place in Barcelona almost a decade beforehand, which commanded him to journey to Rome for an audience with the Pope and also contained the germination of the book he was to write while in Patros.

We will now describe the activities of this Prophetic Kabbalist in Greece, during the years before he reached Patros around 1278. According to *Sefer ha-Yashar*, it would seem that Abulafia sojourned in Patros for five years, and since he left Spain in 1273 he could only have stayed in the other two cities for a total of two years. This is 'an excerpt from Abulafia's short autobiographical travelogue:

I have also taught it in many places: in Capua to four by accident who strayed from the fold, for they were youths lacking in knowledge so I left them. In Thebes there were ten and not one of them succeeded, rather they lost both paths—the first as well as the second. Four in Euthrypo and also without any success, for opinions very much differ between people, all the more so [when concerning] the depths of wisdom and the secrets of the Torah. I did not discern in them anyone who was worthy to receive even the chapter headings of the truth as it is.⁶¹

The reference concerning the four students in Capua can be substantiated by checking the manuscript version of *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, as well as Abulafia's *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, which is dedicated to these same four students.⁶² Yet the continuation of this sentence, as printed by A. Jellinek, "and in their midst ten" is a difficult reading: How is it possible that among his four students, who were according to Abulafia all weak, there were ten more? Further scrutiny of the manuscript version renders instead of "and in their midst ten"—"and in Tibezen ten", which is in medieval Hebrew the customary way of spelling the Greek city of Thebes. Similarly, the word "Azrifo," also printed by Jellinek

was formulated before he ever came to Sicily, in fact it appears in his *Sefer ha-Yashar* written in Patros. See H. Hames, "From Calabria Cometh the Law, and the Word of the Lord from Sicily: The Holy Land in the Thought of Joachim of Fiore and Abraham Abulafia," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 20/2 (2005): 187–99.

⁶¹ *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, ed. Gross, pp. 368–369. Compare to Jellinek's version, printed in *Beit ha-Midrash*, Vol. 3, XLI.

⁶² See *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, A. Gross edition (Jerusalem, 2002), 17–8.

and subsequently copied by other scholars, must be corrected according to the manuscript version to read 'BRYPW, Euthrypo—the correct name for one of the Peloponnese straits. This teaches us that Abulafia had fourteen students while in Greece, all of whom in his opinion were of poor caliber. Accordingly he claims explicitly that he did not give over to them by oral tradition the “chapter headings.” Ostensibly this proves that even if he did teach Maimonides's *Guide* in Greece, he did not give over its secrets to his students, while he did in fact possess esoteric traditions during this period, the 70s of the thirteenth century.

However, Abulafia's words deserve deeper investigation. Immediately following his mention of his four students in Euthrypo he writes, “for opinions very much differ between people, all the more so [when concerning] the depths of wisdom and the secrets of the Torah.” Moreover, after he mentions his students in Thebes he states, “rather they lost both paths, the first as well as the second.” It stands to reason that in fact Abulafia did teach two paths to his students in Thebes, even though they lost them, in other words they were beyond their comprehension. It would seem that the second path refers to Abulafia's unique method of reading the *Guide* according to his own understanding, through the principles of the Linguistic-Prophetic Kabbalah that were characteristic of him. This interpretative method, which concerned the secrets of the *Guide*, was recorded in three separate commentaries that Abulafia composed on the *Guide*, at least the first of which, *Sefer Ge'eulah*, was written in 1273, sometime before his return to Greece.⁶³ It is likely that Abulafia dedicated *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, probably his second commentary, to his students in Thebes. Now this suggestion does seem illogical: Why would Abulafia dedicate his book to people who he himself describes as “not one of them succeeded”? However this question is invalidated by the fact that his third commentary on Maimonides's *Guide*, *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, was dedicated to his students in Capua, of whom afterwards he described as those who have “strayed from the fold.” Consequently, we are informed that aspersions cast on former students does not preclude the possibility that at a certain stage of their instruction Abulafia did not totally desist from revealing to them the secrets of the *Guide*. If we compare the

⁶³ See C. Wirszubski, *Between the Lines: Kabbalah, Christian Kabbalah and Sabbatianism*, ed., M. Idel (Jerusalem, 1990), 34–48 (Hebrew).

number of students who heard Abulafia's teachings in Greece to those in Italy and Spain, we will easily ascertain that it was in Greece that Abulafia's teachings were more readily accepted. Even in Sicily, where Abulafia resided for the last decade of his life and where he enjoyed, in his own opinion, great success, we cannot count more than eight students. This demonstrates that it was especially in Greece that Abulafia found fertile soil for his activities.

The question arises: did the fact that Abulafia spend on his second visit at least six years in Greece have any impact on his Kabbalah? There are two areas of interest pertinent to this inquiry: can we detect any influences stemming in general from the surrounding Greek culture? Secondly, can we entertain the possibility that Abulafia's Kabbalah was influenced by the specific brand of mysticism that was indigenous to Greece, namely the Greek Orthodox mystical movement known as Hesychasm? The answer to the first question is emphatically positive; more than any other Kabbalist, maybe even more than all the Kabbalists put together, Abulafia uses Greek words in his works.⁶⁴ On this subject, the Greek background to Abulafia's writing is exceedingly clear. In regard to the second question, perhaps there are indeed resemblances to be found between certain issues in Abulafia's Kabbalah and in the writings of one of his students to Hesychastic Mysticism.⁶⁵

The question of how deeply Abulafia's Kabbalah influenced the development of the Kabbalah in general and in the Byzantine Empire in particular still remains a desideratum for intensive research. In order to measure his impact on one geographical area or another, one would first have to identify the Kabbalists who penned works considered to belong to the Prophetic Kabbalah, for example; *Sefer ha-Tzeruf*, *Sefer Ner 'Elohim*, *Sefer 'Or ha-Menorah*, *Hakdamah*, *Sefer ha-Rehavah*, *The Anonymous Commentary on the Maimonidean Thirteen Principles of Faith*, as well as other extant works.⁶⁶ We still do not even know where these books were composed, except maybe at least in the last case, the *Anonymous Commentary*, where it can be argued that its provenance is Greek, since it was copied [verbatim] into *Sefer 'Even Sappir*

⁶⁴ This subject deserves a separate study. See my *Messianic Mystics*, 302.

⁶⁵ Idem, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. J. Chipman, (Albany, 1988), in Foreword, see also 14, 24, 35, 40, 52n, 80, 121, 177n.

⁶⁶ Idem, *R. Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrine*, 69–75, 78–80.

by R. Elnatan ben Moshe Qalqish, composed in Constantinople.⁶⁷ In any event, it is evident that a sizable portion of Abulafia's *oeuvre* was copied into Byzantine manuscripts, if we can judge by the provenance of the manuscripts, and this would support the claim that the Ecstatic Kabbalah continued to interest people in the Byzantine Empire well after Abulafia's departure, as was also the case in Sicily.⁶⁸

The greatest impact of Abulafia's Kabbalah is to be found in *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*, as Jellinek has already noted the fact that this anonymous Kabbalist copied into his work almost all of Abulafia's *Sefer Gan Na'ul*, and also included several long quotes from his *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*.⁶⁹ We have mentioned above the latter work: the former was written for an anonymous Kabbalist or student with whom Abulafia corresponded. Since this book exists in relatively few manuscripts, three in fact, it would seem that perhaps the author of *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* used a copy belonging to a relative or a follower of Abulafia's correspondent. However, going beyond the fact of the verbatim copying of Abulafia's works by the author of *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*, this book also contains many discussions written in the vein of the Prophetic Kabbalah, and even when we cannot find direct quotes from this literature, there is extensive use of *gematria*, letter-combinations, and other concepts that are congruent with Abulafia's Kabbalah.⁷⁰

In addition to the direct traces of Abulafia's Kabbalah itself, the influence of post-Abulafian Prophetic Kabbalah is recognizable in Byzantium. This is already evident in the book *Sefer 'Even Sappir*, which quotes a portion of *Liqqutei ha-Ran*, whose author is identifiable, in my opinion, as R. Natan ben Sa'adyah Har'ar, one of Abulafia's

⁶⁷ The *Anonymous Commentary* is extant in several manuscripts, e.g., Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 2360, and quoted in *Sefer 'Even Sappir*, Ms. Paris, National Library 728, fol. 154b. This composition will be discussed below.

⁶⁸ The special affinity between the convert-translator Flavius Mithridates, who was born and grew up as a Jew on the island of Sicily, and Abulafia's Kabbalah is an important testimony to the continuity of Prophetic Kabbalah on the island, at least until the middle of the fifteenth century. On this subject see M. Idel, "The Ecstatic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia in Sicily and its Transmission during the Renaissance," *Italia Judaica* V (1995): 330–40 (especially pp. 337–9).

⁶⁹ See Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrash*, Vol. 3, XLIV; also see Idel, *Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrine*, 11; M. Kushnir-Oron, *The Sefer Ha-Peli'ah and the Sefer Ha-Kanah: Their Kabbalistic Principles, Social and Religious Criticism and Literary Composition*, (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1980), 75–80 (Hebrew).

⁷⁰ See for instance fols. 70a–b, 71a–b, and others.

students and most possibly a teacher of R. Isaac of Acre.⁷¹ The book *Sefer Shushan Sodot* explicitly displays within it the impact of R. Isaac of Acre's Ecstatic Kabbalah, and it also seems influenced by R. Natan mentioned above.⁷² Traces of the writings of these Kabbalists are not recognizable in the literature produced in other centers, including Spain, and we will return to this observation in the following pages.

III. SEFER HA-TEMUNAH AND ITS LITERARY CIRCLE

Despite the above survey, to understand the development of the Kabbalah in the Byzantine Empire exclusively in terms of the dissemination of the Prophetic-Ecstatic Kabbalah would only yield a very partial picture. Another stream of the Kabbalah, also of Spanish provenance, flourished in an exceptional manner in the Byzantine Empire. We are referring to a very specific type of kabbalistic literature, completely different from the Prophetic Kabbalah, whose central teachings include the transmigration of souls or *gilgul* and the doctrine of cosmic cycles or *shemittot*, the most well-known representative of this literature being *Sefer ha-Temunah* [*The Book of the Figure*].⁷³ An important question still to be resolved concerning the development of the Kabbalah in general would be to ascertain the geographical location and date of the composition of *Sefer ha-Temunah*. The premise that this book was composed in Gerona sometime during the middle of the thirteenth century, as G. Scholem opined for most of his life and on this basis charted the historical development of the Kabbalah, is lacking in hard bibliographical evidence.

It seems that the first person to ponder the possible identity of the author of the *Sefer ha-Temunah* was the Safedian Kabbalist R. Moshe Cordovero. In his composition entitled *Shi'ur Qomah* he wrote concerning *Sefer ha-Temunah*: "We do not know who the author of this book is, except that we received a tradition that these are the words of

⁷¹ About this author see *Natan ben Sa'adyah Harar, Le Porte della Giustizia, Sha'arei Sedeq*, ed., M. Idel, trans., M. Mottolese (Adelphi, 2001).

⁷² To be discussed below in section 7.

⁷³ On the subject of other compositions related to the *Sefer ha-Temunah* see G. Scholem, "The Secret of the Tree of Emanation of R. Isaac: A Work (*quntres*) Stemming from the Kabbalistic Tradition of the *Sefer ha-Temunah*," *Qovetz 'Al-Yad*, New Series Vol. 5 (1951): 64–70, (Hebrew); about the book itself see E. Gottlieb, *Studies in the Kabbala Literature*, ed., J. Hacker, (Tel-Aviv, 1976), 570–1 (Hebrew).

R. Isaac the author of the *'Or Zaru'a* and the author of the *Mar'ot ha-Tzove'ot*, *Sefer ha-Gadol*, and the *Sodei Razaiyya*. Since I have listed for you his [other] books go and investigate them, find out for yourself if you can trust his novellae, since he is considered a contemporary scholar."⁷⁴ Gershom Scholem thought that the aforementioned "Rabbi Isaac," the supposed author of *Sefer ha-Temunah*, was mistakenly confused by a copyist with R. Isaac ben Moshe from Vienna, a contemporary jurist who penned a halakhic work also entitled *'Or Zaru'a*, correctly recognizing that Cordovero meant a kabbalistic work penned in medieval Spain by R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid. Nevertheless, Scholem rejected the tradition adduced by R. Moshe Cordovero stating: "it is evident that this tradition is incorrect. There is no doubt that R. David did not compose *Sefer ha-Temunah*, for it was already read by R. Abraham Abulafia and R. Yosef Gikatilla, who quote it, the former in his *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, and the latter in his commentary on the Song of Songs found in Ms. Paris 790, fol. 83b and other places. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that R. David indeed knew this work and was very influenced by it, accepting its doctrine of the cosmic cycles."⁷⁵

This passage, written by Scholem in 1928, served to secure the historical position of *Sefer ha-Temunah* for the new modern scholarship of the Kabbalah. Actually, here Scholem followed in the footsteps of his predecessors, Aharon Jellinek, Marcus Ehrenpreis, and David Neumark,⁷⁶ all of whom concluded for completely different reasons that *Sefer ha-Temunah* was composed during the thirteenth century. Ehrenpreis even proposed that this book was historically related to the kabbalistic doctrines of *Sefer ha-Bahir*, R. Azriel of Gerona, and R. Isaac ben Abraham ibn Latif.⁷⁷ Consequently, we can see that Scholem's conclusion that the provenance of *Sefer ha-Temunah* was Gerona sometime during the thirteenth century was a natural con-

⁷⁴ *Shi'ur Qomah* (Warsaw, 1883), fol. 80a. Indeed, there is a composition attributed to a R. Isaac stemming from this circle entitled, "The Secret of the Tree of Emanation," see the previous note.

⁷⁵ Scholem, "R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid the Grandson of Nahmanides," *Qiryat Sefer* Vol. 4 (1927-1928), 302-27, (Hebrew) see p. 326. See now the updated version in a new collection of Scholem's articles, *Studies in Kabbalah* (1), eds., Y. Ben-Shlomo and M. Idel (Tel-Aviv, 1998), 161, 176.

⁷⁶ See *A History of Philosophy in Israel*, (revised edition, Jerusalem, 1971), 271-6 (Hebrew).

⁷⁷ M. Ehrenpreis, *Die Entwicklung der Emanationslehre in der Kabbala des XIII. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt a.M., 1896), 42-3.

tinuation of an already accepted scholarly view. Accordingly, we find that in Scholem's various formulations of the history of the beginnings of the Kabbalah he would often conclude with a description of this particular book, presumably due to his supposition that it displayed close conceptual ties to the literature of the Geronese Kabbalists. It was not until 1987 when the updated English translation of his *Origins of the Kabbalah* was published, that Scholem revised his opinion and moved the date of composition of *Sefer ha-Temunah* to around 1300, albeit still arguing for its conceptual ties to the Geronese Kabbalah.⁷⁸ However, we must bear in mind that during the long period before the publication of the updated English version of his *Origins*, Scholem's former view of the date and location of the composition of *Sefer ha-Temunah* was the accepted one throughout the academic literature.

The dating of *Sefer ha-Temunah* to the thirteenth century began in the nineteenth century with the publication of Jellinek's *Philosophie und Kabbala*.⁷⁹ In it Jellinek lists this book as one of the sources used by Abulafia since it appears in a composition that I have discussed above, *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*. Jellinek's assumption was accepted by Scholem,⁸⁰ and it would furnish the only solid literary evidence for the dating of *Sefer ha-Temunah*. The argument ran that since Abulafia's *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'* was known to have been composed in the year 1280 in Italy, it should provide a firm *terminus ad quem* for the composition of *Sefer ha-Temunah*. Since Abulafia is the only thirteenth-century author to have ever mentioned this book, we should thoroughly investigate his supposed reference to *Sefer ha-Temunah*.

And if you are to be included as one of the true lovers of the Torah's Wisdom, you must pursue this Wisdom until you glean from it the truth of the existence of Man and his essence. [This is learned] from the books of Natural Science, like *Sefer ha-Yetzirah* and *Sefer Temurot*—that are words of our sages, or from the books of the philosophers.⁸¹

⁷⁸ See *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 460–1 and note 233. Compare this to my opinion stated in my recent article "The Jubilee Year in Jewish Mysticism," *Fins de Siècle—End of Ages*, ed., J. Kaplan, (Jerusalem, 2005), 67–98 (Hebrew).

⁷⁹ Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbala* (Leipzig, 1853), 43; see also Jellinek, *Quntres Taryag*, (Vienna, 1878), 41.

⁸⁰ See G. Scholem, *Manuscripts of the Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1930), 26 (Hebrew); idem, *The Beginnings of the Kabbalah*, 181 (Hebrew); idem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1974), 52.

⁸¹ In the version published by A. Gross, p. 79, we find printed "*Sefer ha-Temunah*"

The reading “*Sefer Temurot*” instead of the printed “*Sefer ha-Temunah*” appears in three reliable manuscript versions of Abulafia’s *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*: Ms. Paris National Library 777, fol. 111a; Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1583, fol. 5b; Ms. London British Library 757, fol. 83a. Other somewhat less reliable manuscript sources, like Ms. Jerusalem National and University Library 8^o 34, fol. 28a, give the reading “*Sefer Temurot Hashem*.” I imagine that this reading was the link that allowed the next variation found in other manuscripts—“*Sefer ha-Temurot*,” which in turn eventually led to a reading which is even closer to that found in the printed version—“*Sefer ha-Temunot*.” Having now shown the accepted reading of *Sefer ha-Temunah* to have been incorrect can we ascertain from the above passage any information concerning the identity of the book Abulafia called “*Sefer Temurot*”? I am inclined to answer in the affirmative; Abulafia is referring to the *Midrash Temurah* or *Temurot*⁸² that is still extant and was compiled apparently sometime during the first half of the thirteenth century. The fact that Abulafia mentions *Sefer Yetzirah* and *Sefer Temurot* together underscores the obvious to anyone who cares to examine the extant *Midrash Temurah*; this Midrash is based on the ideas set forth in *Sefer Yetzirah* on subjects concerning what Abulafia termed the “Natural Science,” as well as focusing on the “essence” of man.⁸³ In contrast, *Sefer ha-Temunah* does not fit the description given by Abulafia in the above passage; it focuses primarily on issues concerning the divine essence—and could not be further from discussing “Natural Science.” It is important to mention that this identification of Abulafia’s reference to *Sefer Temurah* with the *Midrash Temurah* was already noted by R. Abraham the son of the Vilna Gaon in his study of midrashic literature entitled *Rav Pe‘alim*.⁸⁴ Another factor for identifying *Sefer Temurot* is Abulafia’s attribution of the book *Sefer Temurot* to the

⁸² This Midrash has been published a few times, noteworthy is the edition published by S. Wertheimer in his *Batei Midrashot*, Vol. 2, 187–201. On this particular Midrash see Zunz, *Derashot be-Yisrael* (Jerusalem, 1947), trans. M. Zak, 295–6, notes 145–7, and p. 57 (Hebrew); B.-Z. Dinur, *Israel in the Diaspora* (Tel-Aviv, 1969), Vol. 1, book 4, p. 211 note 16 (Hebrew); *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 16, col. 1518. See now the edition and Italian translation of M. Perani, *Il Midrash Temurah* (Bologna, 1986), especially pp. 58–63.

⁸³ A detailed comparison between the *Sefer Yetzirah* and the *Midrash Temurah* was undertaken by Perani, *Il Midrash Temurah*, 40–1.

⁸⁴ (Warsaw, 1894), 123–4. R. Abraham errs when he gives the date of Abulafia’s composition of *Sefer Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’* as being 1453. He was misled by a reference from a manuscript belonging to David Oppenheimer, apparently one of those

“words of the sages,” which is corroborated by the extant *Midrash Temurah* ascribed to the sages R. Akiva and R. Ishmael. Also noteworthy is the fact that traces of this Midrash are to be found in other works dating from around the period of the composition of Abulafia’s *Sefer Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*; R. Levi ben Abraham mentions it in his *Sefer Livyat Hen*,⁸⁵ later R. Menahem ha-Meiri in his commentary to the Tractate *‘Avot*,⁸⁶ and there is a distinct possibility that R. Bahiya ben Asher, a late thirteenth-century renowned author, also knew of this Midrash.⁸⁷ Thus, we have shown that this passage from Abulafia does not refer to *Sefer ha-Temunah*, although the relationship of its circle to Abulafia’s literary legacy is worth close scrutiny. In my opinion, the *Commentary on the Seventy-Two Names*, another work belonging to this circle, was compiled after Abulafia’s time and apparently under his influence, as is corroborated by the fact that a passage from *Sefer Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’* appears as the introduction to the *Commentary* printed in *Sefer Raziel ha-Mal’akh*.⁸⁸ Another case of a [possible] citation of *Sefer ha-Temunah* in the work of a thirteenth-century Kabbalist was also overturned. E. Gottlieb has shown that an extant *Commentary on the Song of Songs* that quotes *Sefer ha-Temunah* was spuriously attributed to R. Joseph Gikatilla, a thirteenth-century Castillian Kabbalist, and he entertains the possibility that the copyist R. Shem Tov ibn Foliyya might even have been its true author.⁸⁹

Confronted with firm evidence of the unreliability of the two supposed references to *Sefer ha-Temunah*, Scholem changed his mind and revised its date of composition to the late thirteenth century, but still held that it reflected the *Weltanschauung* of Geronese Kabbalah.⁹⁰ However, it seems that *Sefer ha-Temunah* was never mentioned by any of the Kabbalists active on the Iberian Peninsula before the Expulsion. In light of this fact, it is singularly important to note that the first two writers to quote the actual *Sefer ha-Temunah* hailed from the

now found in the Bodleiana Library at Oxford. See also Y. Eisenstein, ed., *‘Otzar ha-Midrashim*, (New York, 1915), Vol. 2, p. 580.

⁸⁵ Ms. Oxford-Bodlian 1285, fols. 72b–73a; Ms. Munich 58, fol. 59a, where the Midrash is called “*Sefer ha-Temurot*.”

⁸⁶ Introduction, fol. 15b; Eisenstein, *‘Otzar ha-Midrashim*, 580.

⁸⁷ See Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashot*, Vol. 2, p. 188.

⁸⁸ See *Sefer ‘Otzar ha-Raviyah* of Elyakim Milzahagi where he correctly proves that this passage in *Sefer Raziel ha-Malakh* is from *Sefer Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*, although he errs when he attributed other passages in it to the pen of Abulafia.

⁸⁹ *Studies in the Kabbala Literature*, 117–21.

⁹⁰ *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 460–1 and note 233, [see note 78].

Byzantine Empire—the author of *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* and the author of *Commentary on the Song of Songs* spuriously attributed to R. Joseph Gikatilla. Both of these works were copied by R. Shem Tov ibn Foliyya, probably in the city of Negropont, as Gottlieb already suggested.⁹¹ On the other hand, I have argued in some of my previous studies for positing strong ties between R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi and his circle and *Sefer ha-Temunah*.⁹² As we shall see, this Ashkenazi Kabbalist exerted a strong influence on this book and its adjoining commentary, as well as on *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*.

Taken together, the absence of any reference to *Sefer ha-Temunah* in Spain and its first appearance in Byzantine kabbalistic literature leads to a tentative assessment of its time and place of composition—sometime around the middle of the fourteenth century in the Byzantine Empire, between 1335–1345. The fact that this book eventually became a classic of kabbalistic literature was due to developments within kabbalistic thought that occurred only after the Expulsion from Spain. Prior to this period, not a trace of this book can be detected in any Spanish kabbalistic writings.⁹³

All that we have said concerning *Sefer ha-Temunah* mostly holds true as well for its commentaries, which in turn exerted their influence on the author of *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* and others belonging to this literary circle.⁹⁴ In fact, we can perceive a distinct continuity of ideas stemming from R. Joseph Ashkenazi, passing on to *Sefer ha-Temunah* and then

⁹¹ *Studies in the Kabbala Literature*, 117–21. About this author see also J. Hacker, “The Emigration of Spanish Jewry to the land of Israel and their Ties to it During the Years 1391–1492,” *Shalem* (Jerusalem, 1974), Vol. 1, pp. 133–7 (Hebrew).

⁹² See for instance, M. Idel, “The Meaning of *Ta'amei Ha-'Ofot Ha-Teme'im* of Rabbi David ben Yehuda He-Hasid,” in *'Aleï Shefer: Studies in the Literature of Jewish Thought Presented to Rabbi Dr. Alexandre Safran*, ed., M. Hallamish (Ramat Gan, 1990), 18–21 (Hebrew); idem, “R. David ben Yehuda he-Hasid's Commentary on the Alphabet,” *'Aleï Sefer*, Vol. 10 (1982), 26 and the notes therein. Also see H. Pedaya, *Nahmanides: Cyclical Time and Holy Text*, (Tel-Aviv, 2003), 110–3, 212, 228 note 1.

⁹³ I will add that the collection of compositions that were copied by R. Shem Tov ibn Foliyya, or according to another conjecture perhaps were even composed by him, are of utmost importance and to be understood as a prime indication of the intellectual climate that prevailed during the generation wherein the *Sefer ha-Kanah* and *Sefer ha-Peli'ah* were composed, and there is still much research to be done before this matter is concluded. I will mention one small detail, which in my opinion is very important, that in one of the manuscripts that R. Shem Tov copied there is a page, written by another hand, that contains the preface to the *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*, and I doubt whether this is merely a coincidence. Compare this to note 127 below.

⁹⁴ Kushnir-Oron, *Sefer Ha-Peli'ah and the Sefer Ha-Kanah: Their Kabbalistic Principles*, 83.

afterwards to its commentary, all the way through to *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*. This succession bears testimony to the singular development of one branch of R. Joseph Ashkenazi's Kabbalah, the one that did not opt to include within it the Zoharic type of Kabbalah, as did the other branch, represented by R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid. Also in contrast to R. David, who highly esteemed R. Joseph Ashkenazi's theory of the sublime lights or *tzahtzahot* and went on to develop it in his own writings, *Sefer ha-Temunah* largely ignored this doctrine. Efraim Gottlieb was the first to notice that the doctrine of *shemittot*, particular to *Sefer ha-Temunah*, as well as a reference to it by name, appears in two other works copied in the Byzantine Empire: *The Commentary on the Song of Songs* spuriously attributed to R. Joseph Gikatilla and a treatise on kabbalistic *Sodot*; both of which were copied or even perhaps composed by R. Shem Tov ibn Foliyya.⁹⁵ I am of the opinion that these two works belong to the aforementioned first Byzantine branch of R. Joseph Ashkenazi's type of Kabbalah.

As we have seen, the two "solid" proofs that allowed for a mid-thirteenth century dating for the composition of *Sefer ha-Temunah* in Spain have been refuted. In the absence of direct evidence, all of the subsequent research relied on Scholem's supposition that *Sefer ha-Temunah* influenced the writing of R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid, as a fact. Indeed, as the tradition adduced by R. Moshe Cordovero in the passage quoted above attests, there is certainly an affinity between a doctrine of cosmic cycles or *shemittot* characteristic of R. David's writings and one that is also found in *Sefer ha-Temunah*. This influence or borrowing was assumed by scholars to be due to the fact that R. David is notorious for seemingly appropriating kabbalistic sources as his own, sometimes even when the passage is of sizable proportion. Nevertheless, I have not found one single verbatim quote from *Sefer ha-Temunah*, or for that matter any of the literature of this book's circle, in the writings of R. David or of his teacher R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi.⁹⁶ On the contrary, we can

⁹⁵ *Studies in the Kabbala Literature*, 117–21.

⁹⁶ Compare to M. Hallamish, "Towards an Assessment of the Influence of *Sefer Ha-Bahir* on the Kabbalist R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi," *Bar-Ilan Year Book*, 7–8 (1969–1970), 233 (Hebrew); idem, *A Kabbalistic Commentary of Rabbi Yoseph Ben Shalom Ashkenazi on Genesis Rabbah*, (Jerusalem, 1984), Introduction, 13, 21 (Hebrew); G. Vajda, "Un chapitre de l'histoire du conflit entre la Kabbale et la philosophie: la polemique anti-intellectualiste de Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi de Catalogne," *AHDMLA* 23 (1956): 55, 59; D. Matt, *The Book of Mirrors: Sefer Mar'ot ha-Zove'ot by*

assume the opposite type of development, namely that the writings of these Kabbalists exerted their influence upon the unknown author of *Sefer ha-Temunah*. I would like to point out that in a few manuscripts *Sefer ha-Temunah* is bound following *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* composed by R. Joseph Ashkenazi. Statistically speaking, however, this is not very significant, since these are both ubiquitous compositions, for the most part found separately in many manuscripts. There are some manuscripts of *Sefer ha-Temunah* which display a phenomenon almost exclusive to the kabbalistic works of R. David and R. Joseph; above certain words appear abbreviated notations that are references to the names of specific *Sefirot*.⁹⁷ This phenomenon explicitly shows the affinity between *Sefer ha-Temunah* and the works of these two Kabbalists. This same phenomenon of notation is also found in a few manuscripts of *Sefer ha-Peli'ah*, to be discussed later, and these manuscript witnesses were found bound with material belonging to R. Joseph Ashkenazi and *Sefer ha-Temunah*. Pertinent to our discussion is the observation that the tendency of combining astrological elements within the theosophical system of the *sefirot*, so pronounced in the works of R. Joseph Ashkenazi, also appears in *Sefer ha-Temunah*. To demonstrate one clear conceptual affinity to the Kabbalah of R. Joseph Ashkenazi, we will quote a passage from *Sefer ha-Temunah*:

All is hidden in the secrets of the ten sublime *Sefirot* of *belimah* . . . within the [divine] attributes [*Middot*] that allude to everything, which are [also] called the "chapter headings," including the language of the ministering angels, all their speech in it [namely the language]. And from them are derived every name [of every being] in the upper worlds, the living beings, seraphim, *'ofanim*, angels, heavenly spheres and the stars. All that is necessary for human language, all names, speech and expression, since they allude to and are divided between the attributes. For each attribute encodes some names, things, and matters which derive from it, for all is included within that measure. Also the angels' language, words and matters, are all encoded in one *Sefirah*, from whose quality all those

R. David ben Yehudah *he-Hasid* (Providence, 1982), 32–3; H. Pedaya, "Shabbat, Sabatai and the Shrinking of the Moon—the Holy Union: Letter and Figure," in *Myth in Judaism*, ed., H. Pedaya, (Beer-Sheva, 1996), 173–91 (Hebrew). Concerning the writings of this Kabbalist see G. Scholem's quintessential article, "The True Author of the Commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* Attributed to the RaBa"D and his Works," *Studies in Kabbalah* (1), 112–36.

⁹⁷ On the subject of this phenomenon see M. Idel, "R. David ben Yehudah *he-Hasid*'s translation of the *Sefer ha-Zohar*," *'Alei Sefer* 8 (1980): 63–6, 72–3 (Hebrew); idem, "Kabbalistic Prayer and Colors," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, ed., D. Blumenthal, Vol. III, (Atlanta, 1988), 17–27.

entities are derived, as we find in the Kabbalah from the wise Kabbalists, who understood all this from the Prophets and the Sacred Writings, which instruct this matter by verses known to the wise. And these are called the chapter headings, for they are the limbs of the [divine] body and the *Sefirot*, which are in the image of man, for man is a microcosm.⁹⁸

The underlying conception expressed in this passage is the centrality of the *Middot* or the *Sefirot*, which are considered to be the source of various modalities: language or even languages, mankind as well as the angels, the world of the angels, the heavenly spheres and the stars. Concomitantly, there exist correlations between certain biblical verses and their particular *Sefirah*. Understandably, the main symbol denoting the entire sefirotic system, alluded to in the above passage, is the “image of man,” which served as the organizing principle for discussion of the nature of the *Sefirot*. Of utmost importance for our discussion is the expression, repeated twice in the above passage and often throughout the book *Sefer ha-Temunah*—the “chapter headings” (*roshei peraqim*). According to ancient Jewish traditional sources, this is the classic expression for the content of the oral transmission of secret lore. In that context the term refers to the secrets of the Torah, whereas in our context it has a threefold meaning: “chapter headings” sometimes refers to key biblical verses, sometimes connotes specific limbs of the human body, and sometimes to the *Sefirot*, since they are considered as the categories or starting points of a process that ultimately generates other complex systems. Compare this exceptional usage of the term “chapter headings” with a passage from R. Joseph ben Shalom ha-'Arokh Ashkenazi's *Commentary on Sefer Yezirah*:

Behold in these seven degrees you will find all the power of the seven planets. How the power emanates to them from the power of the Name Y-H-V-H and the ten *Sefirot* from the power of the forty-two letter Name, they are the chapter headings. And when you search the biblical text you will find that each and every verse of the Torah is a chapter heading, imbued with power, and it (i.e. the Torah) should always be in front of your eyes, through them (i.e. the verses) the future is made known, in the Name of Y-H-V-H 'aDoNaY may He be blessed.⁹⁹

The actual meaning of the expression “chapter headings” is delineated in a chart found in the *Commentary*. It divides the combinations of the divine Name that consists of forty-two letters into seven parts, each

⁹⁸ *Sefer ha-Temunah*, fol. 25a; for the Ms. version see fols. 32b–33a.

⁹⁹ *Commentary on Sefer Yezirah*, fol. 53b.

one of them governing a different heaven, planet, seven year cycle, jubilee year, and organs of the human head. As the above passage demonstrates, the “chapter headings” are related to biblical verses; according to the chart they are also tied to human limbs as well as *Sefirot* and *shemitot*. The special way R. Joseph Ashkenazi utilizes the expression “chapter headings,” is reminiscent of *Sefer ha-Temunah*'s usage of the expression and demonstrates their conceptual affinity. The appearance of Greek words in the anonymous commentary on *Sefer ha-Temunah* is noteworthy, as well as in the writings of R. Joseph Ashkenazi, a fact that can denote a Byzantine background of some sort for these authors.¹⁰⁰

Sefer ha-Temunah or as it sometimes called *Sefer ha-Temunot*, is the most important composition of its kind, belonging to a wide spectrum of kabbalistic works that share its world view. A small number of these works were printed as addendums to the book itself, although there are many more extant compositions that display a similar attitude. The most important one is its anonymous *Commentary* printed alongside it. The “Secret of the Tree of Emanation” by R. Isaac,¹⁰¹ as well as the *Commentary on the Pesah Haggadah*, spuriously attributed to R. Moshe de Leon,¹⁰² both belong to the literary output of the circle of *Sefer ha-Temunah*. Three versions of a kabbalistic “Commentary on the Divine Name of Seventy-Two Letters,” which were published in the famous book *Sefer Raziel ha-Mal'akh*, are quite similar in structure to *Sefer ha-Temunah*.¹⁰³

IV. R. ISAIAH BEN JOSEPH HALEVI THE GREEK

The compositions of R. Isaiah ben Joseph the Greek, also sometimes referred to as R. Isaiah “from Thebes,” are mostly buried in manuscript

¹⁰⁰ See *Sefer ha-Temunah*, fol. 58b: “aliqodosis” meaning the wheels of a water mill. Concerning R. Joseph and the Greek language see Y. Liebes, “How the Zohar Was Written,” in *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. S. Nakache (Albany, 1993), 200 note 55. See also now, the reference to *Sefer ha-Temunah* by a Byzantine homilist, discussed by D. Schwartz, “On the Characteristics and the Sources of R. Efrayyim ben Gershon's Sermons,” *Alei Sefer* 21 (2010): 92 (Hebrew).

¹⁰¹ See G. Scholem's edition, “The Secret of the Tree of Emanation of R. Isaac: A Work (*quntres*) Stemming from the Kabbalistic Tradition of the *Sefer ha-Temunah*,” *Qovetz 'Al-Yad*, New Series 5 (1951): 71–102 (Hebrew).

¹⁰² See the printed version in *Haggadah Shelemah: The Complete Passover Haggadah*, M. Kasher, ed., S. Ashkenazi (Jerusalem, 1967), 121–32 (Hebrew).

¹⁰³ (Amsterdam, 1701), fols. 25a–32a.

and are still awaiting thorough analysis.¹⁰⁴ His works were composed sometime towards the end of the first third of the fourteenth century [1325–1335?], and are apparently not all extant since he himself mentions works of a seemingly kabbalistic nature that we do not possess, like his *Sefer Hashkafat ha-Sekhel*. Some of his *oeuvre* was published by Solomon Moshe Mussaioff including, *Sod 'Etz ha-Da'at*, *Sefer 'Otzar ha-Hokhmah*, *Sefer ha-Kavod*, *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh* and *Sefer Gan 'Eden*.¹⁰⁵ R. Isaiah displays a philosophical understanding of the *Heikhalot* literature as well as the Kabbalah, with a clear neoplatonic streak, influenced by Jewish as well as Arabic sources. His writings include two discussions of *Sefer Shi'ur Qomah*. In his *Sefer ha-Kavod* R. Isaiah takes a position similar to that of R. Abraham ibn Ezra¹⁰⁶ when he writes:

For the divine portion [soul] suffuses the whole body, like the Glory of the Revered Name suffuses each [heavenly] sphere, and this is the meaning of the entire *Sefer Shi'ur Qomah* [Book of the Divine Measurements]. When it says about *ha-Shem* that the face of the Holy One Blessed be He is such and such [a measure], and His arms are such and such [an amount of] parasangs, and His legs are such and such [an amount of] parasangs, the intended meaning of these words are that the face is *Keter 'Elyon* [the first *Sefirah*], which provides the influx for the Angels,¹⁰⁷ His arms allude to the [world of the] Angels, His legs allude to the [Heavenly] Spheres, as it is written, "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool."¹⁰⁸ This is not [to say] that God has a body or that He possesses a face or arms or legs or thighs, Heaven forbid! These words are hints at intellectual entities and [as we already know] great mountains are suspended by [only] a hair.¹⁰⁹

The use of the term "*Keter 'Elyon*" should not lead to any misunderstandings: R. Isaiah does not demonstrate in his writings a classical theosophical conception of the *Sefirot*. He consistently identifies the *Sefirot* with the Separate Intellects, whom he also calls Angels,¹¹⁰ and so *Sefer Shi'ur Qomah* is viewed by him as an allegory alluding to

¹⁰⁴ For the time being see G. Scholem, "Manuscripts of the Kabbalah," *Qiryat Sefer*, Vol. 7 (Jerusalem, 1930), 41–3 (Hebrew).

¹⁰⁵ (Jerusalem, 1891).

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Ezra is mentioned by name several times in R. Isaiah's writings.

¹⁰⁷ *Keter 'Elyon* usually is called by R. Isaiah the Active Intellect of the angels, for instance see fol. 81b. See fol. 46b where this *Sefirah* is also termed *Nishmat Shaddai*—meaning the soul of the angels.

¹⁰⁸ Isaiah 61: 1.

¹⁰⁹ *Sod 'Etz ha-Da'at*, fol. 47a.

¹¹⁰ See *Sefer Gan 'Eden*, fol. 31b; *Sefer 'Otzar ha-Hokhmah*, fol. 82a.

the three worlds, upper, middle and lower, similar to the stand taken by R. Abraham ibn Ezra in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Although, it does seem that his definition of the relationship between God (referred to as *Causa Causarum* or 'Illat ha-'Illot) and the world, as the relationship of the "divine portion"—or the soul—to the body, is reminiscent of the attitude of *Sefer ha-Kuzari*.¹¹¹ By interpreting the divine limbs of the *Shi'ur Qomah* as allusions to spiritual powers, R. Isaiah effectively neutralizes the significance of the numerical measures. In his *'Otzar ha-Hokhmah*, a philosophical interpretation of the *Greater Heikhalot*, R. Isaiah states:

"For from the throne and above [measures] one hundred and eighty thousands by tens of thousands [180,000,000] parasangs"—means that above the throne cannot be measured, for He does not possess a body and [therefore] cannot be measured, Heaven forbid! And when it says, "from His right forearm till His left forearm [the span] is one hundred and eighty by tens of thousands [180,000,000] parasangs"¹¹² it means that there is a great difference between the Attribute of Mercy, alluded to by the right forearm, and the Measure of Judgment, alluded to by the left forearm—not that He has a body or a right forearm or a left forearm, Heaven forbid!¹¹³

This viewpoint transforms the exact and monumental measurements that are given in the text and renders them as non-dimensional expressions.¹¹⁴ Ostensibly, we can here detect influences that originate in anti-anthropomorphic philosophical trends as found in the interpretation of the *Shi'ur Qomah* text already offered by Abulafia. Other influences stemming from the Ecstatic Kabbalah are noticeable in the works of R. Isaiah: the function of music in the process of attaining prophecy,¹¹⁵ his usage of erotic imagery in describing ecstatic experiences,¹¹⁶ and a

¹¹¹ R. Yehudah Halevi is mentioned several times in R. Isaiah's writings.

¹¹² The measurement given in the *Greater Heikhalot*, chapter 12, is different: "from the right forearm to the left forearm are seventy-seven tens of thousands parasangs." The number 180 does appear in this chapter in reference to the measurement of the height above the throne.

¹¹³ Fols. 81b–82a.

¹¹⁴ Gershom Scholem also held this opinion concerning the meaning of the *Sefer Shi'ur Qomah*, see his *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (New York, 1991), 24: "In reality though, all measurements fail, and the strident anthropomorphism is suddenly and paradoxically transformed into its opposite: the spiritual."

¹¹⁵ See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, 58.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 213 note 51, 197.

spiritualistic understanding of messianic phenomenon.¹¹⁷ All of these issues are characteristic of topics found in Abulafian Kabbalah.

V. R. ELNATAN BEN MOSHE KALKISH AND HIS
SEFER 'EVEN SAPPİR

The book entitled *Sefer 'Even Sappir*, written by R. Elnatan ben Moshe Qalqish has come down to us in two different versions. One is a short version in which the Kabbalah plays only a tangential part,¹¹⁸ and the other is the longer and later version, composed in Constantinople during the years 1367–1368, extant only in a few manuscripts now found in the National Library in Paris (Hebrew Mss. 727–728).¹¹⁹ The latter is a voluminous work that contains many kabbalistic passages scattered throughout its hundreds of folios. The author lived in Constantinople,¹²⁰ but previously studied in Spain¹²¹ and probably also in Italy.¹²² We can assume that during the period he spent learning in Spain he also acquired his knowledge of the Theosophical Kabbalah and subsequently, either from writings that he acquired in Italy or Greece or maybe even from personal contacts during a sojourn in Greece, he also absorbed influences stemming from the Ecstatic-Prophetic Kabbalah of Abulafia and his students. *Sefer 'Even Sappir* is an extensive, and for the most part eclectic work, replete with discussions on Jewish law, philosophy, and Kabbalah. The author copied long tracts and even

¹¹⁷ See *Sefer ha-Kavod*, fol. 42b.

¹¹⁸ On the subject of the first version of the *Sefer 'Even Sappir* see E. Kupfer, "The Identification of Manuscripts in the Research Center for Hebrew Manuscripts in the Jewish National Library," *Proceedings of the Fifth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1973), 137–8 (Hebrew). For a printed edition of the shorter version, written in 1323, see R. Cohen (Jerusalem, 1998).

¹¹⁹ The longer version of the *Sefer 'Even Sappir* was finished in the year 1368 in Constantinople. On this composition see D. Schwartz, *Charms, Properties and Intellectualism in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Ramat Gan, 2004), 142–74 (Hebrew); also I. Ta-Shma, *A Collection of Studies: Research on Medieval Rabbinic Literature, Volume 3: Italy and the Byzantine Empire* (Jerusalem, 2006), 12–3, 15–7 (Hebrew).

¹²⁰ Ms. Paris, National Library 728, fol. 39a. Like Abulafia, R. Elnatan used Greek and Latin words in his compositions, see for example Ms. Paris National Library 727, fols. 4a, 100b.

¹²¹ Ms. Paris, National Library 728, fol. 50a.

¹²² R. Elnatan copied from the Latin translation of his contemporary, R. Yehudah Romano, see Ms. Paris National Library 728, fol. 167b.

whole compositions, often without attributing his sources, sometimes preserving for us some hitherto unknown kabbalistic materials.¹²³

The greatest impact by far on R. Elnatan ben Moshe Qalqish's thought is to be found in the Kabbalah of R. Abraham Abulafia and his school. Although Abulafia's works are never quoted verbatim, nor is his name ever mentioned, *Sefer 'Even Sappir* is replete with discussions that clearly bear the imprint of the Prophetic Kabbalah, and in my opinion reveals the process by which this type of Kabbalah was internalized and continued to inspire other creative works. I will offer one example among many in order to illustrate this phenomenon:

God, may he be praised, gave us His holy Torah and taught us the path of letter-combination and the steps of the ladder, in the form of the letters, as He perceived that we are not intellectually capable of attaining knowledge of Him without this great and correct proposal. For... from the light and seraphic sphere of the intellect there shall be born as the image of the prophetic vision, and this is the ultimate purpose of the letter-combination. And according to its refinement and the power of its innerness, these [methods] are worthy of being called premises... for they are as levels by which to ascend on high, because it is balance of the scales, depending on the light of the intellect and not on sensible light.¹²⁴

The method of letter combination was held in high esteem by R. Elnatan, for it is viewed by him as the way to revelation, even the way for one to attain the level of prophecy. This clearly points to the influence of Abulafia's technique, as well as an appreciation of its ultimate mystical goals. Even R. Elnatan's reference to "the ladder" demonstrates his use of Abulafian terminology. It is noteworthy to mention the possible connection between *Sefer 'Even Sappir*, in its longer version, to one of the compositions of the aforementioned R. Isaiah ben Joseph ha-Levi the Greek.¹²⁵

¹²³ For an example see M. Idel, "Mundus Imaginalis and Liqqutei HaRan," in *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 74.

¹²⁴ Ms. Paris National Library 727, fol. 10a. On the relationship between letter combinations and the Torah see the passage from Abulafia's *Sefer 'Imrei Shefer*, discussed above note 36 and Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, 114.

¹²⁵ Compare the passage in *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, fols. 9a-b to Ms. Paris National Library 727, fol. 174a. It seems that here R. 'Elnatan copied from R. Isaiah ha-Levi.

VI. *SEFER HA-PELIY'AH* AND *SEFER HA-QANAH*

In recent studies, scholars have argued for the Byzantine provenance of two very important and influential kabbalistic works, the books entitled *ha-Peliy'ah* and *ha-Qanah*. Aharon Jellinek was the first to advance, although very briefly,¹²⁶ a reasoned argument concerning the origins of these two works, namely that they were not composed in Spain as was supposed, but rather in the Byzantine Empire.¹²⁷ *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* is a wide-ranging commentary on the first few chapters of the book of Genesis, whereas *Sefer ha-Qanah* is an extensive exposition on the subject of the "Rationales for the Commandments" according to the Kabbalah. We can assume that both of these books were composed in the beginning of the fifteenth century by the same, still anonymous author, who lived in an area suffused with Byzantine culture. This Kabbalist followed the eclectic style of the Byzantine Kabbalist R. 'Elnatan ben Moshe, collecting copious amounts of kabbalistic materials, slightly paraphrasing them and then incorporating them into his own works. The sheer abundance of kabbalistic materials that the author copied and their having originated from diverse schools of kabbalistic thought testifies as a hundred witnesses for the wide dissemination of this lore during this period in the Byzantine Empire. From the sixteenth century onward, these two works were considered classics of the Kabbalah. This acceptance was apparently due to their pseudo-epigraphic framework, having been set as a dialogue between different members of the family of R. Nehuniah ben ha-Qanah, and also due to the disclosure of revelations of Elijah that appear in *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*.

¹²⁶ Jellinek, *Kuntres Taryag*, 129.

¹²⁷ See Kushnir-Oron, *Ha-Peli'ah and Ha-Kanah—Their Kabbalistic Principles*, 1–14; I. Ta-Shma, "Where Were the Books *Ha-Kanah* and *Ha-Peli'ah* Written?" in *Chapters in Jewish Social History... Dedicated to Prof. Jacob Katz* (Jerusalem, 1990), 56–63 (Hebrew). See also M. Oron, "Who composed the *Sefer Ha-Kanah* and the *Sefer Ha-Peli'ah*?" *Tarbiz* 54/2 (1995): 297–8 (Hebrew), where she rejects the suggestion of S. Bauman, "Who composed the *Sefer ha-Qanah* and the *Sefer Ha-Peliy'ah*?" *Tarbiz* 54/1 (1995): 150–2 (Hebrew), who argued that the author was R. Shem Tov, and see above, note 93. The view that these works reflected the social realities of Spain was championed by Y. Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* Vol. 1 (Philadelphia, 1978), 369–73; and B. Netanyahu, "Towards an Evaluation of the Date of Composition of the Books *Ha-Kanah* and *Ha-Peliy'ah*," in *Salo Wittmayer Baron Jubilee Volume*, ed., S. Lieberman (Jerusalem, 1975), Volume III, 247–68 (Hebrew). On the acquaintance with *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* by a sixteenth-century Byzantine homilist see Schwartz, "On the Characteristics," 95.

Another kabbalistic trend, utterly distinctive from the Prophetic Kabbalah, gained prominence in the Byzantine Kabbalah. This is the Theosophical Kabbalah from the school of R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi, also known as R. Joseph *ha-'Arokh* (The Tall). Traces of this type of kabbalistic thought were not yet apparent in the writings of R. Isaiah ben Joseph ha-Levi the Greek, nor in *Sefer 'Even Sappir*, but its impact upon the books *ha-Qanah* and *ha-Peliy'ah* are a commonplace in scholarship.¹²⁸ I would like to briefly describe the material belonging to this school of kabbalistic thought, material which will prove relevant to our understanding of the Byzantine Kabbalah. *Commentary on the Sefer Yetzirah*, spuriously attributed to RABAD, (the acronym of twelfth-century R. Abraham ben David of Posquieres), has been a classic of Kabbalah since its appearance in the late thirteenth century and up until the Kabbalah of R. Isaac Luria Ashkenazi and his followers. To be sure, we are not only speaking of one composition, important though it may be, but rather with a multifarious and varied *oeuvre* penned by the aforementioned R. Joseph, R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid, and their students and their students' subsequent followers.¹²⁹ Clearly, not all of these works reached the Byzantine Empire, some were composed outside of its borders, possibly in Spain, and there is a tendency of late to see North Africa as their point of origin¹³⁰—but this remains as yet unclear. It seems that it was in the Byzantine Empire that the author of *Peliy'ah* and *Qanah* obtained a type of manuscript, one that we still possess some copies of today, which bound together *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* and afterwards *Sefer ha-Temunah*. The latter is found in several Byzantine manuscripts together with the aforementioned *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* of R. Joseph's, and we discussed above its close ties to the system of kabbalistic thought belonging to the school of R. Joseph Ashkenazi. These two works together are among the main contributing sources of the vast collage that constitutes *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Kushnir-Oron, *ibid.*, 82, 187–93.

¹²⁹ On the plausibility of the premise that a school of thought connected to R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid ever existed see M. Idel, "Kabbalistic Materials from the School of R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, Vol. 2, (1983), 169–207 (Hebrew). On the possible connection between this school and the *Sefer ha-Temunah* see *ibid.*, 203–5, and especially note 207.

¹³⁰ See Hallamish, *Kabbalistic Commentary of R. Yoseph Ben Shalom Ashkenazi on Genesis Rabbah*, 12.

¹³¹ See for instance, Ms. Cambridge, Or. 2116, 8/1; Ms. Oxford-Bodlian 1953.

These two works share a unique formulation of the theory of the cosmic cycles, more extreme than the one promulgated by Nahmanides and his circle, and one that did not manage to have a significant impact in Spain. Emphasizing the centrality of the cosmic cycles in such an open manner is characteristic of the school of R. Joseph, *Sefer ha-Temunah*, the texts copied by R. Shem Tov ibn Foliyya who was active in Byzantium at the beginning of the fifteenth century, in the books of *ha-Qanah* and *ha-Peliy'ah*, and later on, in an even more extreme manner, in *Sefer Shushan Sodot*. I cannot dwell here on the details of this unique theory of the cosmic cycles which became a cornerstone of Byzantine Kabbalah. Suffice it to say that this theory, which holds that the world is now in the cycle of the sefirah of *din* or stern Justice, which has its roots in Spanish Kabbalah but was ultimately rejected by it, found its deepest expression in the school of *Sefer ha-Temunah*.¹³² Its sixteenth-century revival among Spanish Jewry after the Expulsion is a subject in and of itself, one which demonstrates how a sheltered Spanish Kabbalah reacted when confronted with other and diverse Kabbalistic worldviews absorbed during the émigrés' sojourns in areas once considered to be Greek. We are referring to Spanish Kabbalists like R. Meir ibn Gabbai in the Land of Israel, R. David ben Avi Zimrah in Egypt, and in North Africa R. Abraham Adrutiel. I have pointed out another similarity between R. Shem Tov ibn Foliyya and the author of *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* in another place.¹³²

VII. R. MOSHE OF KIEV AND HIS *SEFER SHUSHAN SODOT*

In order to underscore the unique character of the Byzantine Kabbalah and demonstrate just how distinct it was from the Kabbalah that developed in Spain, I would like to point out the absence of direct influences of all strata of the Zoharic corpus—which formed the backbone of Spanish Kabbalah during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—on the Kabbalah that flourished in the Byzantine Empire up until the Spanish Expulsion. This is clearly the case in the works of R. Isaiah ben Joseph ha-Levi the Greek, in *Sefer 'Even Sappir* of R. Elnatan ben Moshe Qalqish, and even in the case of the books *Qanah* and *Peliy'ah*, where passages quoted from the Zohar have been culled secondhand

¹³² See M. Idel, "On the History of the Injunction Against Learning Kabbalah Before the Age of Forty," *AJS Review* 5 (1980): 11–12 (Hebrew).

from the works of R. Menahem Recanati, as already shown by Michal Kushnir-Oron.¹³³ During the course of the controversy on the theory of transmigration of souls (*gilgul*) in Candia, E. Gottlieb has already noted that the *Zohar's* influence was only peripheral. He attributed the fact of the Kabbalists turning a blind eye to the *Zohar's* rather positive stance on the matter of *gilgul* as due to the paucity of Zoharic texts found in Candia during the second third of the fifteenth century.¹³⁴ E. Gottlieb's conclusion can be further confirmed by other material dealing with the controversy that I have subsequently identified from manuscripts.¹³⁵

We have in our possession two Kabbalistic works composed at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries written by R. Moshe of Kiev. In my opinion, this Kabbalist drew his sources from kabbalistic material extant by his time in the former Byzantine Empire.¹³⁶ In his *Sefer Shushan Sodot*, R. Moshe of Kiev provides us with a singular development of the theory of the cosmic cycles, as well as preserving, in this anthology of kabbalistic literature, remnants of, in my opinion, a Byzantine composition that distinguishes itself by addressing the object of religious devotion as "Lord of the Cosmic Cycles."¹³⁷ This lost work—which elsewhere I intend to describe its extant remnants—clearly demonstrates a more extreme position on the issue of cosmic cycles than does either *Sefer ha-Temunah* or *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*, and deserves an elaborated analysis, which remains a desideratum for scholarly research. Important testimony attesting to the fund of kabbalistic subjects to be found in the provinces of the former Byzantine Empire are reflected in just a few lines of *Sefer Shushan Sodot*. R. Moshe of Kiev states that he has recently found kabbalistic traditions which he quotes in their author's names, and his formulation of these traditions, as they appear in this passage, remains unparalleled in all of kabbalistic literature:

¹³³ *Ha-Peli'ah and Ha-Kanah—Their Kabbalistic Principles*, 80.

¹³⁴ *Studies in the Kabbala Literature*, 373–4.

¹³⁵ See Ms. Paris National Library 800, to which I will return later in this study.

¹³⁶ See H. Lieberman, "Printing in Korets," *Sinai* 68 (1971): 182–9, (Hebrew).

¹³⁷ See for instance, *Sefer Shushan Sodot* (Korets, 1784), folios 13b, 14a. [Or ha-Ganuz edition, 1995, pp. 26–7].

[A] We have already explained this secret according to our own view, but since then I found a passage from our ancient sages¹³⁸ on the same subject, and my heart was filled with the desire [to write it down] because it clarifies what I already wrote. These are the words that were related therein. [B] The learned and enlightened scholar, the honorable Rabbi Nathan said to me these words: Know that the fullness of the secret of prophecy [is fulfilled] when the prophet will suddenly see his own form standing before him, and he will forget and ignore himself while he sees his own form [standing] before him speaking with him and telling him the future. Pertaining to this secret our Sages of blessed memory said: "Great is the power of those prophets who can liken the [created] form to its Creator."¹³⁹ The learned scholar Ibn Ezra said, "the one who hears is a man and the one who speaks is a man"¹⁴⁰ [the text] ends here. [C] Another scholar wrote as a variation on this theme and these are his words: "And I, through the power of letter combination and mental concentration, experienced what happened to me with the light that I saw going with me, as I have mentioned in my book *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, although I did not merit to see my own form standing in front of me, for this I could not achieve." These are his words. [D] Another learned scholar wrote [to this effect] as a variation on this theme and these are his words: "And I, just but a youth, know and recognize with definitive knowledge that 'I am no prophet neither am I the son of a prophet,'¹⁴¹ nor does the Holy Spirit [*Ruah ha-Qodesh*] reside in me, nor can I make use of a Heavenly Voice [*Bat Qol*], for I have not merited this, 'I have not put off my coat... I have not washed my feet.'¹⁴² Nevertheless, I call on the Heavens and the Earth to be my witnesses, as well as those who dwell in the Heavens above—they too can testify, that one day I was sitting and writing a secret [matter explained] by the 'way of truth' [a kabbalistic secret] and suddenly I saw my own form standing in front of me, and my own self disappeared from me, and I was forced and compelled to cease writing."¹⁴³

It has already been pointed out by G. Scholem and E. Gottlieb that section [C] deals with the author of the book *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, a work stemming from the school of Ecstatic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia,

¹³⁸ It appears that R. Moshe was indeed reading from an old manuscript. See Lieberman, 182–3, note 10.

¹³⁹ Genesis Rabba, 24:1; 27:1.

¹⁴⁰ Abraham Ibn Ezra, "For the one who speaks is a man and the one who hears is a man," *Yesod Mora* (Frankfurt, 1840), 50; also see Ibn Ezra's *Commentary on Daniel*, 10: 21.

¹⁴¹ Amos 7: 14.

¹⁴² Paraphrasing the Song of Songs 5: 3.

¹⁴³ *Sefer Shushan Sodot* (Korets, 1784), fol. 69b. [Or Haganuz edition, 1995, 171–2].

and section [D] with R. Isaac of Acre.¹⁴⁴ Section [B] refers to a R. Nathan who is reported to have given over a tradition (“he said to me”) to an unknown student, and in my opinion it also refers to the author of *Sha’arei Tzedeq*, R. Nathan ben Sa’adyah Har’ar.¹⁴⁵ While it is true that section [C] begins with the words “another scholar wrote” which could be explained as now referring to a different personality, we could also translate the same words from the Hebrew as “the same scholar wrote afterwards.” It is reasonable to assume that sections [B] and [C] found in this manuscript read by R. Moshe of Kiev were collected by R. Isaac of Acre, who was the person responsible for preserving other kabbalistic passages penned by this same R. Nathan.¹⁴⁶ We should mention here that *Sefer Shushan Sodot* contains other passages that were in my opinion penned by R. Isaac of Acre, but since they are anonymously copied by R. Moshe of Kiev, scholars have missed identifying their true author.¹⁴⁷ I would like to stress that the material brought in this passage is not extant in any other source, which demonstrates the thesis that we can find important discussions on the study of Jewish mysticism in the Byzantine Kabbalah, texts that otherwise did not survive in any other of the centers of kabbalistic activity.

Clearly, at least one Kabbalist who was familiar with kabbalistic materials stemming from the circle of R. Abraham Abulafia, R. Elnatan ben Moshe Qalqish, also studied in Spain and quotes from the school of Castilian Kabbalah as well—most notably from the Kabbalists R. Moshe De Leon and R. Joseph Gikatilla. On the other hand, R. Shem Tov ibn Foliyya traveled from Spain through Byzantium on his way to the Land of Israel and probably brought with him Spanish kabbalistic texts—perhaps from Segovia. It seems that R. Joseph Ashkenazi’s Kabbalah was also brought to Byzantium from Spain, but we cannot know for certain. Of course, we must remember that the Byzantine Kabbalah

¹⁴⁴ G. Scholem, “Eine Kabbalistische Erklahrung der Prophetie als Selbstbegegnung,” *MGWJ* 74 (1930): 285–90; idem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 253–4; Gottlieb, *Studies in the Kabbalah Literature*, 247; Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, 86–95.

¹⁴⁵ For further information, see my book, *Natan ben Sa’adyah Harar, Le Porte della Giustizia, Sha’arei Sedeq*, and my article, “R. Nathan ben Sa’adyah Har’ar, the Author of *Sha’arei Tzedeq* and his Impact in the Land of Israel,” *Shalem* 7 (2002): 47–58 (Hebrew).

¹⁴⁶ See Idel, “*Mundus Imaginalis* and *Likkutei HaRan*,” in *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 73–89.

¹⁴⁷ See for instance, *Sefer Shushan Sodot*, folios 70a–b, 71a–b.

absorbed in a significant manner the Kabbalah that developed in different parts of Italy, especially that of R. Menahem Recanati, who we have mentioned above, as well as appropriating from the Kabbalah of R. Reuven Tzarfati.¹⁴⁸

VIII. REVELATORY KABBALAH IN THE BYZANTINE/ OTTOMAN EMPIRES

A feature common to both of the main schools of kabbalistic thought which are discussed in this paper, namely, the Prophetic-Ecstatic Kabbalah and the Kabbalah of *Sefer ha-Temunah* and its branches, is that the majority of their works display an acute sense of messianic tension. Abulafia thought himself to be the Messiah, and actively communicated this message, in writing as well as orally, mainly in the vicinity of Italy. Nevertheless, Abulafia's messianic writings were relatively few in comparison to his overall literary output and did not have significant impact beyond a small circle of Kabbalists who closely studied his eschatological writings. In a completely different manner, certain messianic elements recur in *Sefer ha-Temunah* and its related literature.¹⁴⁹ Acute messianic tension is also exhibited in the kabbalistic literature connected to *Sefer ha-Meshiv* which, although it was composed in Spain, its branches continued to flourish in the Ottoman Empire after the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula.¹⁵⁰ While according to Abulafia, who actually did consider himself to be the Messiah, the messianic experience is for the most part internal, in other words intellectual, *Sefer ha-Meshiv* literature does not identify any member of its circle, nor any other historical personality, as the Messiah. Rather, in this circle the Messiah was viewed as a power that was born of the intercourse of the *Sefirot* of *Tiferet* and *Malkhut* in a manner

¹⁴⁸ R. Shabatai Potto, the copyist of Ms. Paris National Library. 786, which contains the *Commentary on the Torah* of R. Menahem Recanati, from the beginning of the fifteenth century, quotes R. Reuven Tzarfati anonymously. See, for instance, fol. 116b, where he copied a passage from Abulafia that was copied by Tzarfati in his commentary on *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*, MS Cambridge, Trinity College 108, fol. 123b.

¹⁴⁹ See the calculation of the end of days in the commentary printed alongside the *Sefer ha-Temunah*, folios 58b-59a. Eschatological calculations also appear in the *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*, this due to the influence of R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi's works on its anonymous author.

¹⁵⁰ See M. Idel, "Neglected Writings by the Author of 'Sefer Kaf ha-Qetoret'," *Pe'amim* 53 (1992): 75-89 (Hebrew).

reminiscent of the birth of Jesus, the last *Sefirah* being described as a virgin who receives the influx of the Holy Spirit. In order to hasten the advent of the Messiah, whose time had already arrived—according to revelations experienced by this school of visionary Kabbalists—the powers of evil, they who would prevent his coming, must be neutralized. To this end magical practices were implemented to draw down Samael and Amon of No, the two chiefs of the realm of evil, to bind them or to otherwise neutralize their power. We are speaking of a vast literature, known within small circles of Kabbalists between the years 1470–1530. It is very likely that R. Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi and R. Shlomo Molkho, who each spent some time in the Ottoman Empire, had been influenced by the contents of this literature. In spite of the fact that the revelations we have just referred to were received by Kabbalists who were active in Spain, Italy, and Sicily in different periods, at least some of these compositions were known in both centers of kabbalistic study that R. Joseph Karo was active in: the area of today's Greece and Safed, then both considered part of the Ottoman Empire. The prophetic works of Abulafia were known in the Byzantine Empire—the first of them was composed in Patros—and it is very likely that the last of the Kabbalists belonging to the circle of *Sefer ha-Meshiv* reached the Ottoman Empire and there composed their works. This demonstrates that of all the centers of Jewish learning that existed, it was in the area now considered Greece that kabbalistic works of a revelatory-visionary nature were more prevalent than anywhere else in the world. Works of a pseudo-epigraphic nature were composed in the Byzantine Empire during the period approximately between 1350 and the beginning of the fifteenth century, for example *Sefer ha-Temunah*, *Sefer ha-Peliyah*, and *Sefer ha-Qanah*. The two latter works were penned by the same author, who repeatedly claims having experienced heavenly revelations, as we have already mentioned. It is striking that in all three of these works great interest is taken in particular formulations of kabbalistic theories that although they may have originated in Spain, were not prominent in Spanish kabbalistic thought. My point concerns certain perceptions on *gilgul* as well as the cosmic cycles, and I will discuss these two subjects at length later on. That these issues were incorporated into these three aforementioned works contributed to their acceptance within the general economy of kabbalistic thought, so much so that even Spanish Kabbalists with conservative leanings like R. Me'ir ibn Gabbai, the anonymous author of the book *Galliya*

Raza', R. David ben Avi Zimrah, and to a certain extent even R. Joseph Karo in his book entitled *Maggid Mesharim*, all accepted these theories in one way or another. *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* is replete with Abulafian material, including a copy of an almost complete version of his book entitled *Sefer Gan Na'ul*.

Logically, we can assume that any Kabbalist who lived in this area during the twenties and the thirties of the sixteenth century could read and adopt most of the kabbalistic revelatory-visionary literature mentioned above. In any event, R. Shlomo Alqabetz was acquainted with Abulafia's Kabbalah and quotes his *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, while his contemporary, R. Joseph Karo, was aware of the ideas originating in the circle of *Sefer ha-Meshiv*.¹⁵¹ In the same area that Alqabetz and R. Joseph Karo lived, sometime close to the middle of the sixteenth century, another work was being written by an anonymous Kabbalist, *Sefer Galia' Raza'*, which also exhibits traces of the visionary elements present in *Sefer ha-Meshiv*, combines Hebrew with Aramaic, and essentially continues a pre-expulsion Spanish kabbalistic tradition.¹⁵²

There can be no doubt that an analysis of Karo's *Maggid Meisharim*, a diary based on Karo's visions first experienced while an inhabitant of the Ottoman Empire, will disclose that his revelations are closer in kind to those of *Sefer ha-Meshiv* than to those of Abulafia. This is recognizable, first and foremost, in his use of language and recurring imagery, as well as his basic kabbalistic perceptions. For example, *Sefer ha-Meshiv*, as far as it could, closely followed the Zoharic literary style and adopted its characteristic mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic. This admixture of languages is non-existent in Abulafia's writings but does play an important role in *Sefer Maggid Meisharim*. In addition, the magical tendencies, so characteristic of *Sefer ha-Meshiv*, primarily its information concerning techniques used to inspire visions, reverberate in Karo's work. Nevertheless, Karo's choice of techniques for attaining revelations of the Mishnah are unlike those advanced by either of the schools of revelatory Kabbalah, at least in one respect.

¹⁵¹ See Idel, "Inquiries into the Doctrine of *Sefer ha-Meshiv*: A Chapter in the History of Spanish Kabbalah," *Sefunot* 17 (1983): 219–26 (Hebrew). Elsewhere I intend to devote a deserved study to an otherwise neglected topic—the impact of the Byzantine Kabbalah on the thought of R. Joseph Karo.

¹⁵² See the introduction of R. Elior to her edition of the unpublished section of the *Sefer Galia Raza'* (Jerusalem, 1981): 1–16 (Hebrew).

While Abulafia and *Sefer ha-Meshiv* both utilize the Holy Names to achieve their visions, what I have called anomian techniques, Karo in contradistinction mostly uses nomian techniques—techniques that are appropriate within the framework of Jewish law or *Halakhah*—in his case the repetitious recitation of chapters of the Mishnah. This constitutes a fundamental distinction, and we can assume that it reflects important socio-cultural differences between these Kabbalists. Abulafia belonged to the strata of society that could be deemed the secondary-elite, someone who was a cultured Jew but who did not occupy any formal position within the Jewish community. He was not an important legalist, nor a communal leader, nor was he a functionary within a royal court, namely a court Jew. This also seems to be the case concerning the anonymous authors of the circle of *Sefer ha-Meshiv*. In contrast, there can be no doubt that such a personage as R. Joseph Karo belonged to the first-elite of Jewish society. During his lifetime Karo enjoyed the status of a major religious figure in Safed, as well as throughout the Diaspora, and even posthumously he retains special status in the annals of Jewish law, his authoritative rulings having sustained generations of observant Jews. Karo's adherence to the recitation of the Mishnah as a mystical technique, in my opinion, reflects the fact that he functioned within a wide consensus of Jewish society. Beyond this fundamental distinction we must stress the element common to these diverse techniques: they are all special types of inducements for attaining divine revelations. They are all short triggers, designed to work quickly and have an almost perfect success rate—if the conditions needed to perform the technique have been perfectly met. From this vantage point, the recitation of the Mishnah, albeit a nomian technique, is to be distinguished from the daily practice of Jewish law, because one's performance of the Jewish ritual are not meant to achieve an immediate result. As such, we can include Karo within the category of revelatory-visionary kabbalistic authors, since he used techniques meant to induce these experiences and they were of the quick and "easy" type.

IX. KABBALAH ON THE ISLAND OF CRETE

An important center of kabbalistic study was Candia, a city located on the island of Crete. In one of his epistles, R. Abraham Abulafia states that he sent compositions (*quntresim*) on the subject of Prophetic

Kabbalah to the island of Crete.¹⁵³ R. Shemaryah ben Elijah Ikriti [of Crete] was acquainted with kabbalistic ideas, even though his thought is not considered to be kabbalistic.¹⁵⁴ R. Elnatan, whom we have previously discussed, lived for a time on this island prior to writing his book *'Even Sappir*, as stated in Ms. Paris National Library 727, fol. 26b. Indirect yet important evidence about the Kabbalah circulating in Candia can be garnered from Elijah ben Eliezer from Candia's *Commentary on the Sefer ha-Bahir*, a philosopher who composed his commentary in the second half of the fourteenth century. As we shall see later on, R. Elijah opposed the Kabbalah and interpreted *Sefer ha-Bahir* in a way as to completely remove its characteristic theosophical conceptions.¹⁵⁵ At the end of the fourteenth century, the oldest extant manuscript of the *Zohar* was copied in Candia,¹⁵⁶ and in the year 1407 a composition written by R. Joseph Gikatilla was copied there as well.¹⁵⁷ In the year 1418, R. Nehemiah ben Menahem Qalomiti completed his book *Milhemet ha-'Emmet* (Battle for Truth),¹⁵⁸ in which he clearly shows his acquaintance with the *Zohar* as well as *Sefer ha-Nefesh ha-Hakhamah* of R. Moshe De Leon.

X. THE CONTROVERSY CONCERNING THE KABBALAH IN BYZANTIUM

A topic in and of itself concerns the anti-kabbalistic polemic that transpired in the Byzantine Empire. There are three exceptional documents pertaining to this controversy that are still extant. One is

¹⁵³ Ms. Sasson 56, fol. 33b.

¹⁵⁴ For more details on the man as well as his thought see C. Sirat, "Epistle on the Creation of the World by Shemaryah Elijah Ikriti," *Eshel Be'er Sheva* 2 (1981): 199–227 (Hebrew).

¹⁵⁵ See Ms. Vatican 431, folios 1a–26b. About R. Elijah and his writings see S. Rosenberg, "The Book of Logic' by Elijah ben Eliezer Hayerushalmi," *Da'at* 1 (1978): 63–4 (Hebrew); Kupfer, "Identifying Manuscripts," 134–5.

¹⁵⁶ G. Scholem, "A New Section from the Midrash ha-Ne'elam of the Zohar," *Jubilee Volume in Honor of Louis Ginzberg* (New York, 1946), 426 (Hebrew).

¹⁵⁷ Ms. Vatican-Barbarina Or. 82, fol. 143b. The copyist was R. Moshe bar Isaac ibn Tibbon, who copied *Sefer Ginat Egoz* by Gikatilla. See I. Ta-Shma, "On Greek-Byzantine Rabbinic Literature of the Fourteenth Century," *Tarbiz* 62 (1993): 109–10 (Hebrew).

¹⁵⁸ See the printed edition, edited by P. Doron (New York, 1975). 'Adoniyah Qalomiti had previously, in the year 1329, copied one of R. Abraham Abulafia's commentaries on Maimonides's *Guide* while in the city of Saloniki, and it would seem that he is a relative of the author of *Milhemet ha-'Emmet*.

Commentary on the Sefer ha-Bahir by Elijah ben Eliezer from Candia, partially preserved in Ms. Vatican 431, which attempts to portray *Bahir* as a philosophical rather than kabbalistic work. In his commentary R. Elijah distinguishes between two types of perceptions concerning the *Sefirot*: the right one, the one that is compatible with “rational thought”—the *Sefirot* seen as mediating entities suspended between God and the world—and the wrong one, the one that views the *Sefirot* as actually being Divine *Middot* (measures or attributes), in kabbalistic parlance—the essence of God. In illustrating the latter perception of the *Sefirot* he writes:

There are those that say that they [the *Sefirot*] are the Attributes of God. They are following the path of the Ishmaelites who profess that God has attributes, only the Ishmaelites are satisfied with three—Wisdom, Power and Will, while they [profess] more than this! So they say—as God is wise with Wisdom so He is powerful by the Dynamis, thus He is kind through Loving Kindness, merciful through Mercy, eternal through Eternity, terrible through Majesty and righteous through Justice. But then there are those that say that the *Sefirot* ARE God, may He be blessed, Heaven Forbid! They have followed in the path of the Christians, and it is incumbent to vilify them and to blot out their memory.¹⁵⁹

I have quoted this passage in order to point out that this criticism of the perception of the *Sefirot* as the essence of God, accompanied with its comparison to Christian theology, is strikingly reminiscent of the criticism by R. Abraham Abulafia in his *Epistle* sent to Barcelona¹⁶⁰ leveled at the students of Nahmanides. Both R. Elijah and Abulafia compare these “essentialist” Kabbalists, those who held the view that the *Sefirot* constituted the essence of God, to Christians.

The second instance, though no less important, pertaining to the anti-kabbalistic polemic comprises the attack of R. Moshe ha-Cohen Ashkenazi on the kabbalistic doctrine of *gilgul*, transmigration of souls or metempsychosis, better known as the “Debate in Candia,” which was described by E. Gottlieb. The documents pertaining to this debate show the fierce opposition to the Kabbalah and are the most extensive of its kind that we possess, up until R. Yehudah Aryeh of Modena wrote his anti-kabbalistic polemic entitled *Sefer 'Ari Nohem*

¹⁵⁹ Ms. Vatican 431, fol. 5b. On the whole issue see now the view of B. Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth: Reincarnation in Early Modern Italian Kabbalah* (Leiden, 2009), 41–70, especially p. 44.

¹⁶⁰ Published by A. Jellinek in his *Ginzei Hokhmat ha-Kabbalah* (Leipzig, 1853), 19.

in the seventeenth century. Traces of this debate probably influenced the detailed criticism leveled against the Kabbalah found in the book entitled *Behinat ha-Dat* written by R. Elijah Delmedigo, which was also composed in Candia. This leads us to the conclusion that there were constant outbursts of opposition to the Kabbalah in Candia and that this phenomenon predated the criticism that was later to be leveled against this lore in Italy.

It is difficult to ascertain to what extent the special character of Byzantine Kabbalah, especially its preoccupation with the idea of metempsychosis, central to it since the fourteenth century, is what instigated the critique in Candia. Even if we allow for the rise of the Christian Kabbalah as the incentive for the anti-Kabbalistic polemic of R. Elijah Delmedigo—and while this cannot be overstated—there is no reason to ignore the local background of the argument, made plain in the debate concerning metempsychosis, the other side defended by the well respected local Rabbi and Kabbalist R. Michael Balbo.

The third document is entitled *Epistle on the Gilgul*. In Scholem's printed lectures on Abulafia, he mentions a certain epistle concerning the doctrine of metempsychosis composed by Abulafia.¹⁶¹ In a letter dated the eighth of Av, 5732 (August, 1972) Scholem informed me that "the manuscript in Paris concerning *gilgul*, which in my opinion was composed by Abulafia, is listed by Zotenberg as no. 800, folios 44–46." The composition found in this manuscript is anonymous and mainly discusses religious issues as seen from a philosophical perspective, one that tends toward the doctrines of Averroes. An examination of its content reveals no relationship between it and Abulafia's theories. All the usual signifiers of Abulafian teachings are absent from this document: letter combinations, prophetic or messianic topics, the use of foreign words, and so on. The *Epistle* was composed as a response to queries concerning metempsychosis and, in my opinion, constitutes the first stage of the debate in Candia held in the fifteenth century between R. Michael ben Sabbatai ha-Cohen Balbo and R. Moshe ha-Cohen Ashkenazi.¹⁶² The *Epistle* under discussion is,

¹⁶¹ *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah and of Abraham Abulafia*, ed., J. ben Shlomo (Jerusalem, 1968), 125 (Hebrew).

¹⁶² E. Gottlieb dedicated a detailed article to this interesting debate, but did not mention this Parisian manuscript, National Library 800. See Gottlieb, *Studies in the Kabbala Literature*, 370–96 (Hebrew); A. Ravitsky, 'Al Da'at ha-Makom, (Jerusalem, 1991), 182–211 (Hebrew); Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*; G. Scholem, *Devils, Demons and Souls: Essays on Demonology*, ed. E. Liebes (Jerusalem, 2004), 210–3 (Hebrew).

in my opinion, the response that R. Michael composed and sent in answer to R. Moshe's questions. Subsequently, I have found a parallel passage from the *Epistle* in another manuscript, Vatican 254, which contains some of the material pertinent to the debate in Candia. To compare the texts, I present both versions:

Ms. Paris National Library 800, fol. 45a

First I must inform you that the Kabbalah is divided into three types: The first is the Kabbalah whose proofs are from Holy Scriptures. The [verses] bear testimony to it and are its evidence, and it needs no other belief for its demonstration other than the many verses [of Scripture] that attest to it. Yet, these verses themselves are [various], some are easy to understand and some are hints—some of these hints being pertinent and some remote. The second [type of] Kabbalah does not derive its proofs from Scripture but rather from the words of the Talmudic Sages... And the third [type of] Kabbalah [stands] alone and its demonstration is rational, as the sun is approximately 170 times greater than the earth.

Ms. Vatican 254, fol. 12b: [Vatican 105, fol. 201b,]

It is incumbent upon us to note that the Kabbalah has been divided into three types: The first kind is the Kabbalah whose proofs are known from the Holy Writ. The [verses] bear testimony to it and are its evidence, and it needs no other validation for its demonstration other than the many verses [of Scripture] that attest to it. Indeed, among these verses there are those that are easy to understand and those that are hints, some close [in meaning] and others remote. The second kind of Kabbalah does not derive its proofs from Scripture at all but rather from the words of the Talmudic Sages alone. And the third kind of Kabbalah [stands] alone and its demonstration is rational.

XI. THE ARRIVAL OF THE SPANISH KABBALISTS AFTER THE EXPULSION

After the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, Kabbalists arrived to the former Byzantine Empire from the Iberian Peninsula—and with them their kabbalistic books. There they encountered the kabbalistic developments that we have described in this study and were duly influenced by them. Thus we find the first references to Byzantine kabbalistic

literature in the writings of Spanish Kabbalists. For example, an anonymous author of the *Sefer ha-Meshiv* circle, writing at the beginning of the sixteenth century, refers to *Sefer ha-Qanah*. Once he mentions “the words of *Sefer ha-Qanah* and his school” alongside a reference to “R. Simeon bar Yohai and his school,” viewing the former as an explanation of the latter—“these are words of clarity, living waters that when seen by the dead they are revived through these words.”¹⁶³ Elsewhere in this composition there is another reference to the *Qanah* also in the context of the Zoharic literature.¹⁶⁴ It is not clear to which book the author is actually referring, *Qanah* or *Peliy’ah*, or maybe both, since the author used the expression “*Sefer ha-Qanah* and his school,” implying both. I have not found that the books *Qanah* and *Peliy’ah* made a huge impact, and this issue deserves a separate study. In any event, the image of a book or even books attributed to “the *Qanah* son of the *Qanah*” needs clarification. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first mention in the entire kabbalistic literature of these books as seminal works, to be discussed alongside the *Zohar*. This attitude can point to the geographic proximity of the author of *Sefer Kaf ha-Qetoret*, presumably the European part of the Ottoman Empire, and the area where the books *Qanah* and *Peliy’ah* were composed, some hundred years earlier. On the other hand, presenting *Zohar* and *Peliy’ah* as the two basic books of the Kabbalah brings to mind a similar situation that arose in this same vicinity about one hundred and fifty years later, when Sabbatai Tzvi testified that he had studied only two books—*Zohar* and *Qanah*.¹⁶⁵ The similar evaluation of the authoritative status of these two bodies of kabbalistic literature, shown by the anonymous Kabbalist of the sixteenth century and by Sabbatai Tzvi is surprising, but also in my opinion significant, since they were both active, it would seem, in the same geographical area. Obviously, I am not suggesting that the same passages that I have presented above from the Schocken manuscript referring to *Sefer ha-Qanah* directly influenced Sabbatai Tzvi; certainly there can only be a very slight chance of this having occurred. But perhaps the attitude expressed was one that gained momentum in the Ottoman areas and subsequently did impact the kabbalistic thought of the seventeenth-century Messiah.

¹⁶³ Ms. Jerusalem, Schocken, Kabbalah 10, fol. 32b.

¹⁶⁴ Ms. Schocken, fol. 56a.

¹⁶⁵ See G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, 115–7, the testimony of R. Moses Pinheiro.

XII. CONCERNING SOME OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BYZANTINE KABBALAH

In light of the bibliographical and textual evidence presented above, it seems conclusive that a long line of compositions that were considered by the last generation of scholars to be of Spanish provenance, actually were composed in the Byzantine Empire. Thus the balance between the contributions of these two locales concerning the production of kabbalistic literature, both in terms of quality and quantity, has been significantly altered. If we compare the creative output of kabbalistic literature in Byzantium during the years 1330–1492 to that of Spain, we can formulate some important conclusions concerning the history of the Kabbalah:

- A. Quantitatively speaking, Byzantine kabbalistic works did not fall short, neither in scope or impact, to those composed in the Iberian Peninsula during this period.
- B. In terms of ideas, we are speaking of Byzantium as a center of kabbalistic study possessing its own character: its Kabbalah retained a blend of Prophetic Kabbalah and Theosophical Kabbalah, originating especially from the school of R. Joseph Ashkenazi. We are not speaking of just a new synthesis of different strands of kabbalistic materials,¹⁶⁶ but rather that Byzantine Kabbalah was reconceptualized through the encounters between kabbalistic trends that remained outside of the general consensus of Spanish Kabbalah, or types of Spanish Kabbalah that were not accepted in Spain, and the Prophetic Kabbalah.
- C. During this period, the Spanish Kabbalists did not produce even one classic work of Kabbalah. In contrast, the books *Qanah* and *Peliy'ah*, *Sefer Shushan Sodot*, and it seems we can include *Sefer ha-Temunah* as well as other works belonging to this circle, all became frequently quoted works from the fifteenth century onwards, until they were printed by the Hassidim during the eighteenth century.
- D. In light of these three conclusions, we can confirm the great importance of the Byzantine center for the general development of the Kabbalah. Without a proper understanding of the processes that

¹⁶⁶ I hope to discuss elsewhere the possibility of a relationship between Abulafia and R. Joseph Ashkenazi.

enabled the appearance of this center, or the ideas that are indigenous to it, we would find it most difficult to gain a proper understanding of the kabbalistic phenomena enumerated here:

1. The character of “Byzantine” Kabbalah during the fifteenth century was dependant upon the encounter between Spanish Kabbalah and local Kabbalah. This is the case for the anonymous author of the book *Kaf ha-Qetoret*, displayed as well in his other commentaries, and other works like *Sefer 'Agudat 'Ezov*, and in the content of *Sefer Razi'el ha-Mal'akh*.
2. The kabbalistic thought of R. David ben Avi Zimrah was deeply influenced by *Sefer ha-Temunah* and in some measure by Abulafian Kabbalah as well. This is also true in the case of R. Moshe Cordovero, as well as R. Shlomoh Alqabetz, who displays in his works a similar blend of kabbalistic conceptions. Although the centrality of the Spanish Kabbalah for these authors remains unchallenged, a more nuanced appreciation of the deep structure of their thought must take into account the contributions of Italian Kabbalah as well as Byzantine Kabbalah.
3. Sabbatai Tzvi's brand of Kabbalah exhibits the influence of Byzantine Kabbalah, especially in its accentuation on revelatory experience. He himself delved into the study of the books *Qanah* and *Peliy'ah* and, as M. Benayahu has amply shown, these books became very popular among the Sabbateans.¹⁶⁷
4. As opposed to the Spanish Kabbalah composed before 1325 and then again at the close of the fifteenth century, prior to the Expulsion and just after it, which was original and conceptually innovative—most of the Byzantine Kabbalah was of an eclectic type. Byzantine originality expressed itself in its willingness to interweave different strands of kabbalistic thought, and this synthesis is exemplified by the majority of the kabbalistic works that beyond doubt were composed in Byzantium.

It should be emphasized that although Byzantine Kabbalah can be characterized by its synthesis of two kabbalistic trends that were not

¹⁶⁷ See M. Benayahu, *The Sabbatean Movement in Greece* (Jerusalem, 1971–1978), 350–5 (Hebrew). See also M. Idel, “The Planet Sabbatai and Sabbatai Tzvi: A New Approach to Sabbateanism,” *Jewish Studies* 37 (1997): 161–84 (Hebrew); idem, “On Prophecy and Magic in Sabbateanism,” *Kabbalah* 8 (2003): 7–50.

accepted within Spain, this does not mean that it rejected out of hand Spanish or Provençal Kabbalah. The writings of R. Isaiah ben Joseph ha-Levi, *Sefer 'Even Sappir*, and certainly *Sefer ha-Qanah* and *Sefer ha-Peliyah* as well as *Sefer Shushan Sodot* are replete with copied passages—at times even plagiaristic—stemming from the Theosophical-Theurgical school of Spanish Kabbalah. We are not speaking of a ban on Spanish Kabbalah but rather a preference for absorbing kabbalistic systems of thought that were not integrated within the main stream of Iberian Kabbalah. In the lands of the Byzantine Empire, perhaps due to the absence therein of significant authoritative rabbinic personalities,¹⁶⁸ these trends flourished in an atmosphere which could foster, undisturbed, even more daring notions.

¹⁶⁸ On the subject of the *Halakhah* in the Byzantine Empire see the pioneering studies of I. Ta-Shma, *Assembled Studies: Inquiries into Medieval Rabbinic Literature*, Vol. III: Italy and Byzantium (Jerusalem, 2005), (Hebrew).